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Amidst mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theodicy: Searching for a Viable Theodicy

A Thesis

Presented to the University of Dublin

for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2008

By

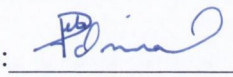
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(Peter J. Admirand)

To

Dar Shiang

and

Ching Huang

For all your prayers and support.

SUMMARY

This work assesses the theological and pastoral viability of key theodic texts within post-Holocaust Jewish thought, liberation theology, and Christian philosophical theodicy through textual analysis of testimonies from the Holocaust, communist gulags, Rwandan genocide, and other mass atrocities. My evaluation of the relevance of theodicy is based on two major presuppositions that I examine throughout the work: 1) theism needs to be able to articulate a viable theodicy; and 2) how a theodicy addresses and incorporates its theoretical limitations, or what I refer to as the fissures, gaps, and caesuras of a faith stance, is the fundamental evaluation of whether a theodicy can be considered viable.

This investigation into the problem of evil highlights the need for a interdisciplinary, interreligious, and multimethodological approach that turns to both theodicists and antitheodicists and seeks to weave both pragmatic and theoretical approaches into the discussion. In this work of theodicy I have distinctively brought together current literary and cultural studies' interpretations of these testimonies with a Catholic theological background.

Also espoused here in this work is the practice of close textual reading to emphasise and interpret dominant meanings within various texts and to "tease out" any hidden or underdeveloped meanings or consequences to make connections and draw conclusions between many diverse texts and positions. This is a crucial practice when seeking to do justice to the victims who have lost all meaning in faith and God because of their ordeals along with those who maintain their faith or even believe because of those afflictions.

Also noteworthy here is the selection of texts of theodicy and antitheodicy, with an aim to highlight the most persuasive and elemental features of both positions. Throughout I maintain that theists must share an antitheodicist's scepticism of theodicy, but still must strive to develop a viable theodic response and so refute an antitheodicist's claim that theodicy is immoral by justifying the unjustifiable, (unwittingly) colluding with some perpetrators of evil by sanctioning evil's legitimacy, or falling prey to blaming the victim who has suffered enough.

This work consists of Three Parts. To ensure the most searing questions are asked, Part One analyses what I call "the testimonies of mass atrocity" in order to be confronted by and listen to those victims of trauma and horrific affliction. Their words of witness and interpretation will depict a world where God and the goodness

of humanity are predominantly absent and where theological statements seem irrelevant and inapplicable.

Seeking a constructive approach to theodicy in Part Two, I examine key theodic texts within Christian philosophical theodicy, Catholic Latin American liberation theology, and Jewish post-Holocaust theology. Because Catholic Latin American Liberation theology is formulated in the context of the poor and voiceless of Latin America, and post-Holocaust Jewish theology under the spectre of the Shoah, approaches within those particular fields address some of the key challenges posed by many testimonies of mass atrocity.

In Part Three I incorporate the key insights and questions posed by the witnesses of mass atrocity from Part One and the theodicists and antitheodicists of Part Two and highlight how each group responds to and challenges the other. Drawing from this encounter between these diverse texts and approaches to evil, I end the work with my five criteria that any viable Christian theodicy needs to integrate, especially when grappling with mass atrocity, genocidal destruction, and the other horrific ills that challenge one's religious faith and striving for meaningful existence. The following are my "Five Criteria for a Viable Christian Theodicy":

1) That it should employ a pastoral approach informed by a post-Holocaust perspective.
2) That it should testify to the pervasive goodness of creation and the need for a disinterested faith.
3) That it should promote a prayerful commitment to remember the victims of atrocity.
4) That it should orient and sustain a devoted praxis.
5) That it should integrate theological protest and radical forgiveness.

By looking at some of the most horrific experiences of suffering on both an individual and collective level, and turning to such witnesses as guides and judges, this work wanted to ensure many silenced or voiceless people are heard and listened to. Including some of the worst cases of suffering was also to ensure a search for meaning would aim to be applicable to everyone. If a theodicy is meaningless to those who most need one, then its value overall is questionable to say the least.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION
THEODICY IN AN AGE OF GENOCIDE

> Who do you think you are, anyway, to imagine yourself so high and mighty as to want to understand the ways of the Blessed name? You are but mortal human beings… And you want to understand the ways of God? The God who lives, exists, was and will be? Who do you think you are?[1]

I. DESPAIR

The title of this work refers to the 'rubble' of theodicy. Such a term is meant to invoke reflection upon the violence and injustice that buries so many individuals in this world and the theodicies that have ultimately failed to address or admit their loss, as loss. My aim is to formulate a viable theodic approach that is pastorally sensitive and theologically acute for our contemporary, post-Holocaust[2] age. A key to this approach will be a sustained 'turning' to testimonies of mass atrocity to test and challenge various theodicies and antitheodicies. From this testing, I aim to highlight salient features that a theodicy needs to incorporate to be viable. It is "viable" because such a position can be 'living' (even at times, dynamic), but will not be bereft of loss, discontinuity, or doubt. The epigraph above, however, from a rabbi murdered at Auschwitz, undermines the possibility to develop any theodicy – for how can a human being understand any purpose and meaning behind God's creation of this world? While such questions can disarm a theist, they pale in comparison to whether one should even desire to understand or acknowledge a God who is said to create a world brimming with goodness and beauty, but one also steeped in agony, misery, and loss.

In A *Long Way Gone*, a former child soldier of Sierra Leone, Ishmael Beah, depicts the moment he was given an AK-47. A child trying to flee war, he had already experienced acts of brutality and violence. Soon, of course, he would partake in them. He writes:

> Still looking straight at me, [the corporal] reached into a wooden crate and pulled out the gun. He took out the magazine and handed me the AK with two hands. I hesitated for a bit, but he pushed the gun against my chest.

---

1. Quoted in Gershon Greenberg, "Between Holocaust and Redemption", in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology,* ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 114-5. He is quoting Rabbi Unsdorfer, leader of the Bratislav Orthodoxy, who was later murdered at Auschwitz (113).

> With trembling hands, I took the gun, saluted him, and ran to the back of the line, still holding the gun but afraid to look at it. I had never held a gun that long before and it frightened me. The closest thing to it had been a toy gun made out of bamboo when I was seven.[3]

The repetition of the word 'gun' and the apt details (hands "tremble" and the gun reminds him of a toy and yet he is "afraid to look at it") begin to paint the story of the metamorphosis of a child into a murderer. It is a world rife with violation, hopelessness, and moral decay.

Similarly, *In Gulag: A History*, Ann Applebaum quotes Hava Volovich, a political prisoner of the Stalinist regime, who gave birth to "Little Eleanora" while in the gulag:

> Every night for a whole year, I stood at my child's cot, picking off the bed bugs and praying. I prayed that God would prolong my torment for a hundred years if it meant that I wouldn't be parted from my daughter…But God did not answer my prayer. My baby had barely started walking, I had hardly heard her first words, the wonderful, heart-warming 'Mama,' when we were dressed in rags despite the winter chill, bundled into a freight car, and transferred to the 'mother's camp.' And here my pudgy little angel with the golden curls soon turned into a pale ghost with blue shadows under her eyes and sores all over her lips.[4]

Little Eleanora survived the train journey but camp life slowly kills her. After working all day at a small mill, Volovich would return to the camps to see her daughter. She continues:

> Little Eleanora, who was now fifteen months old, soon realized that her pleas for 'home' were in vain. She stopped reaching out for me when I visited her; she would turn away in silence. On the last day of her life when I picked her up (they allowed me to breast-feed her), she stared wide-eyed somewhere off into the distance, then started to beat her weak little fists into my face, clawing at my breasts, and biting it. Then she pointed down at her bed.
>
> In the evening, when I came back with my bundle of firewood, her cot was empty. I found her lying naked in the morgue among the corpses of the adult prisoners. She had spent one year and four months in this world, and

---

2. I will examine my use and interpretation of this term in Chapters Ten and Eleven.
3. Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone*: *Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Sara Crichton Books, 2007), 111.

> died on 3 March 1944. . .This is the story of how in giving birth to my only child, I committed the worst crime there is.[5]

Both these stories reek with despair: a child is forced to murder, while the birth of a baby is the "worst crime", and a mother's desperate prayers to God are met only with silence. These are not the only voices in our world, but they are many and vast, and their clamour neither diminishes nor fades with the passing of time.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan challenges his brother Alyosha to answer whether this world's freedom is worth the suffering of one child. He says it is not. The stories above are also of individual loss, but consider, for example, how some experts in Russian history estimate that twelve to twenty million people died "unnecessarily" from a result of the "Red Terror and the Civil War, the famines which followed in the wake of the brutal policy of collectivisation, the mass deportations, the mass executions, the camps of the 1920s, the camps of the 1960s through the 1980s – as well as in the camps and mass murders of Stalin's reign".[6] Jung Chang and Jon Holiday begin their monumental *Mao: The Unknown Story*, stating: "Mao Tse-tung, who for decades held absolute power over the lives of one-quarter of the world's population, was responsible for well over 70 million deaths in peacetime".[7] In turning back to Africa, how many millions of lives in the last century have been lost through genocide, starvation, disease, and wars? A theodicist must weigh not only the notion of millions of lives that have been brutally tortured and murdered, but must remember the individual lost lives like little Eleanora's.

It is not difficult, therefore, to understand the growing support for antitheodic approaches. As Sarah Pinnock writes in *Beyond Theodicy*: "In the intellectual space of twentieth-century thought, the term 'theodicy' has accumulated pejorative connotations among some analytic and continental philosophers. . . In particular, post-Holocaust thinkers widely reject theodicy as morally scandalous".[8] Levinas, for example, writes: "Perhaps the most revolutionary fact of our twentieth-century consciousness – but it is also an event in Sacred History – is that of the destruction of all balance between the explicit and implicit theodicy of Western thought and the

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4. Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor, 2003), 320.
5. Ibid., 320-321.
6. Ibid., 584.
7. June Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (Jonathan Cape: London, 2005), 3.
8. In Sarah Pinnock's *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust*, her focus is on thinkers who "eschew theodicy": Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, Johann Baptist Metz, and Ernst Bloch (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 7.

forms which suffering and evil take in the very unfolding of this century".[9] John Roth adds: "Most theodicies have a fatal flaw: they legitimate evil. They do so by saying too much or too little as they answer questions posed by waste".[10] Many theists, therefore, try to bypass theodicy. Though his position "is not grounded in a theodicy of any kind",[11] Brian Davies in *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil,* examines (and aims to uphold) belief in God despite the dilemma of evil. Others, however, voice more acerbic remarks about theodicy.[12] Peter Berger "has argued that theodicy is a type of social masochism that legitimates social institutions at the expense of suffering individuals",[13] while Amos Funkenstein, after summarising various theodic approaches, writes: "Even these diluted versions of a theodicy are offensive".[14] Disillusionment with theodicy hovers around various causes. Some theodic attempts, it is argued, often prevent an honest appraisal of blame and responsibility; seek to muffle the voices of the victims whose sobering words or jarring scream do not neatly fit into any 'easy' system of beliefs; or posit unethical, if not harmful justifications that (unwittingly) collude with the perpetrators and leave the victim doubly violated – abused and shamed.[15] In *The Evils of Theodicy*, for example, Terrence Tilley analyses the social situation of speech acts in theodic texts to prove how "engaging in the discourse of theodicy *creates* evil".[16]

While one may also turn to a recent title like Michael Stoeber's *Reclaiming Theodicy*,[17] the challenges and accusations against theodicy are wide and diverse. Yet, key questions still remain: Does denying the discourse of theodicy then thwart evil? Does the denial of theodicy entail a denial of God's existence? Contra the antitheodicists, can theodicy still be viable today, especially in the face of catastrophic suffering; and if so, how? Lastly, why would turning to survivor

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9. Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 452.

10. John Roth, "Response", in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 17.

11. Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2006), 229.

12. For Gabriel Marcel, theodicy is "sacrilegious, dogmatic". Quoted in Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 27.

13. Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 25.

14. Amos Funkenstein, "Theological Interpretations of the Holocaust", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, 641.

15. Sarah Pinnock writes that "After Auschwitz, theodicy is exposed as perpetrating amoral justifications of evil and rationalistic caricatures of practical faith struggles" [*Beyond Theodicy,* xi].

16. Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 3.

testimonies from various mass atrocities be a possible means to argue for a theodicy's relevance? When the Baluchistan poet Balach Khan talks of the sadness of "children who dream of more light/ than the sun can spare",[18] can any theodicy provide such ample light to victims like these?

II. Hope

In light of such tragedy and horrors, it is legitimate to ask why another attempt at theodicy is needed or even what right one has to engage in theodicy, but it is more legitimate to ask why another child is forced to murder, why another landslide buries forty-five people, and why the world ignores another genocide. So long as these other questions proliferate and the reverberating torrent of "Why, O Lord?" rings in the hearts and minds of many human beings, the search for answers and explanations will never cease. For a theist, when prayer and questioning are interlocked, when a God of love and justice is invoked, the love of such a God stirs the search to articulate and respond to those eternal questions. It is when silence and resignation follow such losses that spiritual desolation seems to unfurl all about us.

And yet, theodicy can be a 'messy', often unsatisfying approach. How does one, for example, respond to this question by Élie Mizinge, convicted of crimes of genocide in Rwanda: "Why did He not stab our murderous eyes with His wrath? Or show some sign of disapproval to save more lucky ones? In those horrible moments, who could hear His silence? We were abandoned by all words of rebuke".[19] When victims and perpetrators of genocide claim abandonment by God, which approach to theodicy remains meaningful? The choices, indeed, often seem to be stark: one can read a theodicy of hubris or naiveté that claims to leave little room for doubt or questioning, or a theodicy of humility and circumspection that acknowledges its limits and failures. In this work I will argue that only the latter approach is the most sound and fruitful. As *Charles Taylor* writes in *A Secular Age:* "Näiveté is now unavailable to anyone, believer or unbeliever".[20] Theodicy is not alchemy. It cannot turn all mutilation and senseless destruction into intrinsic meaning and purpose. The question is whether it can provide a framework and philosophy to examine honestly this world, the lives and actions of human beings, and the God that is believed to be

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17. Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005).

18. Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 41.

19. As interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Picador, 2006), 145.

20. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 21.

a theist's source and ultimate hope while orienting a person to prevent or combat the horrors that often seem dominant. In such a candid examination, all questions will not be answered and all evil will not be explained away, but, perhaps, a viable position can still be reached. A theodicist, therefore, is one who attempts to analyse the conditions of this world in the context of one's faith tradition and presents a picture or argument for why belief in a loving God can be justified or viewed as a reasonable undertaking. Cognisant of the suffering and frailty of this world, a theodicist seeks to locate or advocate an overall meaning within and beyond it.

My evaluation of the relevance of theodicy is based on two major presuppositions that I want to test: 1) theism needs to be able to articulate a viable theodicy[21] and 2) how a theodicy addresses and incorporates its theoretical limitations, or what I refer to as the fissures, gaps, and caesuras of a faith stance, is the fundamental evaluation of whether a theodicy can be considered viable. Similar to antitheodicists, I am sceptical that any theoretical theodicy will categorically succeed in providing an argument that justifies the existence of mass atrocity or a devastating earthquake. However, I argue that a theist must still aim to develop a viable theodicy, although to do so entails a recognition and incorporation of those fissures, gaps, and caesuras and the need to articulate why one's faith can still believe and hope where the 'evidence' calls for total silence or radical doubt. This stance is based on my conviction that jettisoning theodicy has dire consequences for any possibility of a meaningful, enduring faith. Instead, I want to advocate a fractured (but still viable, even dynamic) faith that is reflected in a fractured (but still viable) theodic position. Through three parts in this work, we will see how and whether this approach can be maintained.

To ensure the most searing questions are asked, Part One analyses what I call "the testimonies of mass atrocity" in order to be confronted by and listen to those victims of trauma and horrific affliction. Their words of witness and interpretation will depict a world where God and the goodness of humanity are predominantly absent and where theological statements seem irrelevant and inapplicable. Where pertinent I will also turn to various perpetrators or bystanders in these events, though I will focus on three non-Christian memoirs and an account depicting a Catholic martyr of Auschwitz.

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21. In Chapter Three we will see D.Z. Phillips describe what has been called "theism without theodicy". In "Useless Suffering", Emmanuel Levinas (analysing Emil Fackenheim) writes of a "faith without theodicy". It would seem that much depends on one's definition of theodicy (and the incorporation of my second presupposition, above) for any hope of salvaging a reasonable theodic position.

Seeking a constructive approach to theodicy in Part Two, I will examine key theodic or antitheodic texts within Christian philosophical theodicy, Catholic Latin American liberation theology, and Jewish post-Holocaust theology. Because Catholic Latin American liberation theology is formulated in the context of the poor and voiceless of Latin America, and post-Holocaust Jewish theology under the spectre of the Shoah, I anticipate that approaches within those particular fields will address some of the key challenges posed by many testimonies of mass atrocity. While there is much diverse thought and interpretation among and within all three fields, I will also argue why they are particularly useful for a Christian theodicist to locate and form appropriate theodic positions.

In Part Three I will aim to incorporate the key insights and questions posed by the witnesses of mass atrocity from Part One and the theodicists and antitheodicists of Part Two and highlight how each group responds to and challenges the other. Drawing from this encounter between these varied texts and approaches to the problem of evil, I will end the work with my five criteria that any viable Christian theodicy needs to integrate, especially when grappling with mass atrocity, genocidal destruction, and other devastating ruptures that challenge one's religious faith and striving for meaningful existence.

Not all problems are solved and not every story has a happy ending. Nor, however, is every ending tragic, for a theodicist must also highlight and promote the holy and sublime of this world, what Dostoevsky termed the "sticky little leaves as they open in the spring".[22] Like sticky little leaves, human beings can also bloom, even after so many winters of discontent[23] and horror. Recall Ishmael Beah, the child soldier who had been given an AK- 47 and who writes in one troubling passage: "Every time I stopped shooting to change magazines and saw my two young lifeless friends, I angrily pointed my gun into the swamp and killed more

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22. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov,* trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Signet, 1986), 224.

23. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard III* in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Dallas: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), I.i.30 (712). Recall how Shakespeare's hunch-backed Richard III is "determined to prove a villain", but still has moments of doubt, a catharsis on the horizon that never fully comes. Despite some of Richard's horrific crimes, he is, arguably, the most appealing and pitiable of all of Shakespeare's villains. His determination for villainy is in part a reaction against "dissembling" nature that created him "deform'd, unfinish'd" and a society that constrains and condemns him because of his physical deformity, a society whose dogs even bark at him. Because his words above are from a soliloquy, he intends to speak without duplicity (even if rationalising the evil he is about to unleash). Thus, he says he will become a villain because nature (and society) will not let him "play the lover". Interestingly, the historical Richard III still has his supporters who claim he has been unduly slandered.

people".[24] That such a victim and perpetrator of evil is now a college graduate and a child soldier advocate for Human Rights Watch is reason not to succumb to despair of this world and humanity. And yet, such a story does not solve the problem of evil. The loss of Little Eleanora still remains, as do Beah's victims. In many ways, Beah's tale further complicates one's moral horizon where the line separating the 'good' from the 'bad' is often inaccurate or blurry. For a theodicy still to be considered meaningful and relevant, however, it must immerse itself within this conflicting, often ambiguous world where suffering and horrific tragedy may strike without warning or reason and where individuals will risk everything to save a stranger or to implement policies to murder an entire people. This work aims to develop a viable theodic position that is formed through such an immersion.

24. Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, 119.

PART ONE
TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND TRUTH: TESTIMONIES OF MASS ATROCITY

> When people see that it is so bald, they think there was never any timber on the mountain. Is this the true nature of the mountain? Is there also not a heart of humanity and righteousness originally existing in man?[1]

> We became more and more cruel, more and more calm, more and more bloody. But we did not see that we were becoming more and more killers. The more we cut, the more cutting became children's play to us.[2]

INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

The two epigraphs above inhabit and represent the themes of hope and despair highlighted in the Introduction to this work. While Mencius' parable points to humanity's original goodness, the second quote, from a perpetrator of the genocide in Rwanda, reveals the extent of depravity which humankind is capable. Part One of this work will seem dominated by despair as I analyse testimonies of mass atrocity.

In Chapter One, "Traumatic Witnessing: Depicting and Interpreting Mass Atrocity", I will first present a brief overview of some of the key questions and problems analysed in this work through turning to the challenge of Irving Greenberg's "working principle". I will then address the issue of whether the scope and magnitude of evil cause particularly acute problems for a theodicy. Because many of the witnesses I focus on have been traumatised and their accounts can be questioned on account of the deleterious effects of traumatised memory, I will briefly examine the meaning of trauma, an often confused, but integral term. I will then divide the experience of trauma into four stages, analysing the process of experiencing, remembering, writing, and critiquing (the depiction of) the traumatic event. Thus, I will trace the often-unreliable nature of memory in such cases, as the moment of trauma, the preponderance of misinformation, the conditions in the camp or prison, the elapse of time, and the tendency for one's memories to become conflated with others, all lead to the potential for such memories to be questioned, if

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1. Mencius, *Mencius*, in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy,* trans. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 56.

2. Spoken by Fulgence Bunani, a Hutu (and fervent Catholic) convicted of crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity. He was interviewed by the reporter Jean Hatzfeld in *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (New York, Picador, 2006), 50.

not cursorily refuted. If I want to use these testimonies to challenge theodicy, I need to be clear in regards to how and why their truth claims and interpretations remain reliable and valuable and how to assess these works fairly and accurately.

In Chapter Two, "Testimonies of Mass Atrocity", I will examine three texts of atrocity from non-Christian sources: Palden Gyatso's *Fire Under the Sun: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner,* Alicia Partnoy's *Little School: Tales of Survival and Disappearance*, and Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land.* While the worlds in those texts are grim and have no testimony of the biblical God's presence, I will also turn to Joseph Malham's *By Fire into Light: Four Catholic Martyrs of the Nazi Camps*, and specifically, to the martyrdom of Father Karl Leisner. Part One will conclude with a reflection on the life of Jesus of Nazareth as a fellow witness and sufferer of atrocity. Many of the Christian theodicists in Part Two will point to the life of Christ as the answer to the problem of evil. An important question is whether presenting Christ as a fellow sufferer in solidarity provides the theological meaning and ground to grant potential purpose to all types of suffering, especially those endured by non-Christians. More specifically, I want to examine the argument that Jesus's life reflects a God who will side with the innocent and oppressed and so God will aim to redeem and heal all those who have endured unjust evil and suffering. However, witness testimony also challenges these assertions and so becomes another imperative issue I must grapple with in this work.

CHAPTER ONE

TRAUMATIC WITNESSING: DEPICTING AND INTERPRETING MASS ATROCITY

> I therefore concluded that it would constitute a criminal neglect of my duty to remain silent about the enormous loss of life…and so resolved to publish an account of a few outrages (and they can only be a few) out of the countless number of such incidents that I could relate…[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

Bartolomé de Las Casas, once awakened to the evils the European conquistadors were wreaking upon the native peoples of the Americas, spent the rest of his life combating such injustice. For my context, the epigraph above (from Las Casas) is challenging one's theology and theodicy to 'sit' at the feet of such victims[2] and to listen and reflect upon horrors and outrages committed against life and the meaning of life.

How to interpret and incorporate such witness testimony to atrocity, however, can be a sharp matter of debate. Critiquing Alexander Donat's remarks that Auschwitz proves there is no God, Moshe Unna, for example, writes:

> There is no basis for us to accept such a personal, subjective testimony as objective truth, no matter how horrifying it may be and no matter how reliable it is as an expression of what took place within the consciousness of the writer….This testimony cannot constitute guidelines in life for us.

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1. Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin, 1992), 6.

2. As will be noted throughout this chapter and work, how we name people, events, or actions especially in the context of atrocity and suffering, will often be a matter of debate. In Jincy Willett's "Under the Bed", the middle-aged protagonist has been raped but is adamant that being called a victim is to make that act of violation define her [the story is included in *Fields of Reading, Motives for Writing, 6th Edition,* eds. Nancy R. Comley, David Hamilton, Carl Klaus, Robert Scholes, Nancy Sommers (New York: Bedford, 2003), 654-61]. Similarly, using the term 'survivor' is problematic, as many of the individuals we will be discussing were murdered, or even if physically alive, feel like Charlotte Delbo: "As far as I'm concerned / I'm still there / dying there / a little more each day / dying over again" [*Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 224]. Agreeing with Claudia Card that victims "are also, often, capable of agency", I will predominantly use the term 'victim' [*The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11]. As will be discussed below, the language of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' can also be problematic as the terms are not always indistinguishable in every instance, or a perpetrator in one instance may have been a victim in another, but as Card acknowledges: "The less than saintly (or even cruel) character of victims does not negate the evils done to them. That Aztecs cut out the hearts of masses of live slaves in sacrifice to their gods does not imply that the conquest of the Aztecs by Hernan Cortes was not evil" (209).

For a sustained discussion of what Lawrence Langer calls "deathlife" (in response to remarks like Delbo's above) see his *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana

> Would we accept as minister of foreign affairs a person who suffered trauma and therefore judges war and peace from that personal perspective?[3]

This chapter will underscore the flaws in this type of discourse that seeks to dismiss these survivor-testimonies on account of the trauma they endured in the "swirl of tragic events".[4] At the same time, in light of the world's initial unquestioning embrace of a fraudulent work like Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, a proper balance needs to be struck to evaluate witness testimony. As Lawrence Langer writes:

> In the case of *Fragments*, sentimental response to details of childhood pain smothered the critical intelligence. The attitude of reverential silence that still greets public presentations of survivor testimony…does not discredit the teller or the tale, but it reveals how unprepared modern audiences remain to find a niche in consciousness for the horrific substance of such narratives. In the absence of such internal locales, fake stories like Wilkomirski's, awash in feeling, are able to flourish and gain a sympathetic ear.[5]

While acknowledging some of the methodological problems in relying upon these texts as "evidence" and an outsider's difficulties in examining these works 'objectively',[6] I will argue why witness testimonies should pervade any attempt to develop and test a theodicy. Therefore, despite the conflicting, multivalent voices among testimonies, I will need to assess how such voices challenge, and perhaps, undermine (if not annul) certain theological positions and doctrines. Are there aspects of one's faith and tradition that are sacrosanct? If so, does this mean that no matter what victims may testify or claim, certain doctrines or aspects of one's theological tradition are impervious to any criticism or challenge? If this is so, what

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University Press, 2006).

3. Moshe Unna, "Who Can Heal You?", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 288-9.

4. Ibid., 289.

5. Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, 55. See also Cynthia Ozick, "Rights of History and Imagination"; and Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Do Facts Matter in Holocaust Memoirs? Wilkomirski / Wiesel", in *Obliged By Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics*, eds. Steven T. Katz and Alan Rosen (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 3-18 and 21-42, respectively.

6. As David H. Hirsch writes: "One of the problems in dealing with Holocaust memoirs, even the most truthful and thoughtful of them, is that it is difficult to determine at what exact moment an author's moral insight has taken place: at the time the act being described takes place, or during that later period when the act is being recorded (or at some moment between these two)". See his essay "The Gray Zone or the Banality of Evil", in *Ethics After Auschwitz:*

are the consequences of adhering to a doctrine or aspect of tradition that offers neither comfort nor relevance to some of the most marginalised and victimised? How does one, therefore, weigh the authority of victims and the authority of one's religious tradition? In order to listen to the full scope of a victim's testimony, it would seem that believers need to accept the fragility and vulnerability of all of their religious doctrine, including its central and most sacred aspects. This practice touches on a fundamental problem facing a theist's encounter with the non-believing or religiously-different other. As John D'Arcy May writes:

> We are thus confronted with an unsettling dissymmetry: in the realm of *gnôsis*, the religions assume their own superiority based on the certainty that they possess definitive truth; in that of *êthos*, however, they refer to the prior demand of the Other as Stranger, in extreme cases even as Enemy, to be treated with respect and love.[7]

When facing and listening to the voices of victims of mass atrocity, such a dissymmetry must be overcome. Therefore, after such listening and reflection, a believer must then begin to gauge how, and whether, one's own beliefs and doctrines are applicable to such a victim, and in light of such probing, how these reflections bear on one's own faith and tradition.

To aid in assessing these works and coming to such an understanding, in this chapter I will examine the process of experiencing, remembering, writing, and reading the traumatic event. As Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw write: "Consciously or unconsciously, we live in the wake of the atrocities brought by war and genocide, in the long shadow cast by their prolonged aftermath. If every age has its symptoms, ours appear to be the age of trauma".[8] As a means to accentuate some of the key issues at stake in my investigation, I will begin by turning to Irving Greenberg's often-cited "working principle" followed by the question of whether the magnitude of mass atrocity poses particularly new or more acute problems for a theodicy in this age of trauma. Such an investigation will then lead to a discussion of the term "testimonies of mass atrocity" and the trauma that is at the root of re-inscribing and enduring such affliction.

Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses, ed. John Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 93.

7. John D'Arcy May, "Catholic Fundamentalism? Some Implications of *Dominus Iesus* for Dialogue and Peacemaking" in *"Dominus Iesus": Anstößige wahrheit oder anstößige Kirsche? Dokumente, Hintergründe, Standpunkte, and Folgerungen* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2001), 131.

8. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw, "Introduction: Extremities", in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community*, eds. Nancy K Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 1.

II. Preliminary Underpinnings

A. Theological Litmus-test: Greenberg's "Working Principle"

After arriving at Birkenau, the reception centre for Auschwitz, one prisoner told Elie Wiesel and those with him: "Poor devils, you are heading for the crematorium". Wiesel thought this man was telling the truth, for

> Not far from us, flames, huge flames, were rising from a ditch. Something was being burned there. A truck drew close and unloaded its hold: small children. Babies! Yes, I did see this with my own eyes…[babies] thrown into the flames (is it any wonder that ever since, then, sleep tends to elude me?).[9]

In response to such examples of terrifying suffering, Irving Greenberg has written, "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children".[10] It is a phrase often invoked at the beginning of many examinations of radical evil,[11] and one which seems to share many affinities with my more general (but, I will argue, more useful) turning to the diversity of witness testimonies. What can be said among burning children? Do not all words get consumed as well? In Greenberg's seminal essay, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust", he seems to dismiss any talk of theodicy in the call for a radical praxis: "To talk of love and of a God who cares in the presence of the burning children is obscene and incredible; to leap and pull a child out of a pit, to clean its face and heal its body, is to make the most powerful of statements – the only statements that count".[12] Echoing these assertions, Kenneth Surin remarks: "No attempted justification of God on the part of human beings can aspire to meet this test; indeed, the thought that it is possible for someone to say, with the sufferings of these children in mind, that God is justified, is a blasphemy. This episode can only prompt penance and conversion; it cannot

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9. Elie Wiesel, *Night,* trans. Marion Wiesel (London: Penguin, 2006), 32.

10. Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust", in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era* (Ktav, 1977), 23.

11. In his essay "The Face of Forgiveness: In a Post-Holocaust World", Henry F. Night, referring to Greenberg's principle, writes: "These words have become constant companions for anyone making serious statements about how life proceeds in our time after Auschwitz". See his essay in *After-Words: Post Holocaust Struggles with Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Justice*, eds. David Patterson and John K. Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 29. See also, Michael R. Steele, *Christianity, Tragedy, and Holocaust Literature* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1995), 1.

12. Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke", 42.

motivate a theodicy, even one which takes the form of an atonement".[13]

Contra Surin, I want to argue that these witness testimonies ultimately support the basis and need to develop a viable theodicy. One way of doing so is through a closer analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Greenberg's principle and its context within Greenberg's other writings, which I will do in Chapter Nine. I will also analyse Marilyn McCord Adams's understanding of the term in Chapter Five. The salient questions to keep in mind for now are:

1) What is the purpose of invoking such a principle at the beginning of any examination of radical evil?
2) Does such a stance ultimately silence anything one can say about God and the problem of evil? If so, what are the theological and moral repercussions?
3) What does it mean to be in the presence of the burning children and who or what determines 'credibility'?
4) Who are theodicies meant for and what is implied in seeking a theodicy despite such evils?
5) What does a call to silence imply about a victim's needs or desires? What about victims who are (or were murdered as) theists?

For my purposes, repeated reminders from witnesses of atrocity (or challenges like Greenberg's working principle) are meant to question, critique, and possibly, annul any subsequent theological statement or point. That is the risk in not only seeking to do theology after Kolyma or Rwanda, but amidst Kolyma and Rwanda. Through the course of this work, we will see how possible or realistic this is, particularly with the scope and magnitude of some evils, an issue I will now address.

B. On Magnitude and Scope

Eliezer Berkovits writes: "With God the quantity of injustice must be immaterial. To think otherwise is a sign of callous indifference toward injustice and human suffering".[14] Contra Berkovits, I have chosen accounts from mass atrocities because I believe these types of evil pose particularly grave problems for the theodicist. Distinguishing the "severity" or "degrees" of evil, as Claudia Card argues "is more complex than one might initially expect. For harm has many aspects and 'degrees' is

13. Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1986), 147-8.

14. Eliezer Berkovits, "Faith After the Holocaust" in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 482.

a metaphor…To say that one evil is worse than another is thus multiply ambiguous and therefore likely to mislead. There are no simple correlations among the dimensions along which different evils may be compared".[15] Despite these difficulties, both Card and I (as will be evident below) still focus on "atrocities", though naming or disclaiming certain events as such can still be a matter of debate.

My focus on atrocities also reflects upon my own Western, Catholic Christian identity. I would call my theodic approach a post-Holocaust one (someone else may focus upon a similarly unique paradigmatic and epochal event)[16] to address key changes to how one needs to interpret the problem of evil today. After Auschwitz and the global condemnation and proclamation of its system of technological but human-devised brutality, after other atrocities in Cambodia, the gulags of Russia or North Korea, the *laogai* of China, the genocide in Rwanda and the (sometimes genocidal) wars in Sierra Leone, the Congo, Liberia, and Sudan, to name but a few, one cannot help reading the Bible and one's religious traditions in a different light. Other devastating events like the destruction of the Temple, the Lisbon earthquake, or the plague have been the cause of faith crises in the past for various religious believers, but two paradigm shifts have complicated the contemporary theodic position.

The first is the spread of universal human rights and the universal application of the dignity of humanity. This means that wherever there is injustice, one (eventually) acknowledges that fellow humans are being maltreated. During war (or another crisis), belligerent factions can sometimes try to conceal this truth, which only heightens the painful awareness of outside observers or some internal participants. In the past, whether it was the Aristotelian concept of natural slavery or the European judgement of African slaves or Aboriginal Australians, one could insulate oneself from a majority of other people's misery. This is not an option for any Christian believer today.

The second shift is our ability to hear and see, often instantaneously, images of

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15. Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, 14.

16. For a detailed discussion of my use of this term, see Chapter Ten and my first criterion for a theodicy in Chapter Eleven. I would also characterise my identity as a post-Vatican II (post-Medellín) Roman Catholic, which is to acknowledge the pervasive (or festering) anti-Semitism in much pre-Vatican II theology, the requirement for theology to be guided by the option for the poor, and the call to acknowledge and overcome a general failure of accepting, listening, and seeking to learn from the other. As Hans Waldenfels writes: "[H]ow can an interreligious dialogue take place when the gifts and talents of the others are not taken into account anymore?" ["Ecclesia in Asia" in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, eds. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 196.Failure to recognise these gifts and talents of the other has led, inexorably, to the Catholic Christian perpetrator slaughtering and defiling millions throughout history, either by intention or neglect.

suffering, war, and devastation from all over the world, whose vastness (and interconnectedness) we have a much greater appreciation of than in the distant past. As Jonathan Glover writes: "Because we live in the first period in history in which there is such full awareness of cruelty and killing as they happen, our response is particularly important".[17] We are constantly reminded of affliction and depravity in the world, often without instances and evidence of the concomitant good. The evidence then is continually piling up, often lopsidedly.

Of major import is the impact such evils have on how one perceives the value and goodness of our world. Thus, in these cases the extent of the harm and suffering, the intention of the perpetrator, and the complicity of the political, civic, and religious institutions in those killings are distinctive to how one interprets and responds to the problem of evil. First, to illustrate a perpetrator's intentions, consider: a murderer kills an individual; a serial killer destroy a number of individuals based on some pattern or shared characteristic; a government purge or persecution targets a high number of individuals, either with a veiled or purported criteria[18] or to spread havoc and fear but not to exterminate systematically any group; while genocide aims to wipe out a whole group "as such". I am tempted to claim the existence of Auschwitz or the Armenian genocide does not raise a substantially deeper moral or philosophical difficulty than the murder of an individual, as all involve senseless losses and horrors, wastes of individual human lives by human beings. However, probing into the differing intentions of those acts reveals important distinctions. As Natan Lerner clarifies in *Religion, Beliefs, and International Human Rights*: "What typifies the crime of genocide is the intent to destroy the group. Since a group consists of individuals, its destruction can only be achieved by steps taken against individuals. But the object of the crime of genocide is the group…".[19] Note that the individual loss gets subsumed into the group's destruction, inflicting another invidious violation of the victim by the culprit. This act does not simply seek to wipe out the individual person, but that person's identity

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17. Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), 42.

18. Soon Ok Lee, a then-committed communist, was sentenced to the North Korean gulags based on a personal grudge with the local commissar. She escaped as a committed Christian. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Persons, Politics, and a Catholic Understanding", in *Christianity and Human Rights: Influences and Issues*, eds. Francis S. Adeney and Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 140. Ok Lee's memoir is *Eyes of the Tailless Animals: Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman,* trans. Rev. Bahn-Suk Lee and Jin Young Choi (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1999).

19. Natan Lerner, *Religion, Beliefs, and International Human Rights* (New York: Orbis, 2000), 70.

and culture without any hope of 'living on' through collective memory or through one's progeny. The crime of genocide is particularly reprehensible because of the aims behind those acts.[20]

Secondly, when a vast portion of the world goes awry, subsuming much of the opposing good, theodicists face a bigger challenge to argue for the goodness of God's creation than in cases of isolated murders outlawed by the State and condemned by the population at large. As Gerald Gashima, Deputy Justice Minister of Rwanda, remarked, "It was as if there was a kind of collective insanity". What makes the genocide in Rwanda so morally debilitating is not only the virtual silence and indifference of most of the world to those massacres, but how nearly every religious and political institution within Rwanda (a traditionally Catholic country) was complicit in the genocide. As Alphonse, a Hutu convicted of genocide, claims: "There is no one who can say to God, eyes closed in prayer, that he never went hunting".[21] He is referring, of course, to 'hunting' as murdering Tutsis.

Similarly, and also well documented, almost every facet of German society participated in or benefited from the establishment and implementation of the Final Solution, from "postal officials [who] delivered mail about definition and expropriation, denaturalisation, and deportation…[to] stockholders [who] made profits from firms that supplied Zyklon B to gas people and built crematoriums to burn the corpses".[22] In reading witness accounts, culpability is spread far and wide; it is inter-generational.[23] That reality paints a picture of our world that is far more challenging to justify than an isolated series of murders or, arguably, even an outbreak of the plague and other disease,[24] as devastating as some outbreaks[25] or

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20. How one defines genocide becomes crucial here (I have used the more flexible term "mass atrocity" though, it too, needs clarifications as will be noted below). For a thorough examination of the term "genocide" and for a history of genocide and genocidal "massacres" or "moments", see Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

21. Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Picador, 2006), 72.

22. John Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2007), 29.

23. Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 40.

24. Much can be said here, particularly if one applies Jon Sobrino's approach and seeks human culpability within such examples of natural evil without placing all the blame on humanity. My argument for why the horrors of Auschwitz or Las Casas' witnessing of Native Americans butchered and enslaved by Europeans pose a worse problem for a theodicist than horrific outbreaks of disease like the plague in medieval Europe – or what may have nearly exterminated the 'Native Americans' – is in part based on hindsight from those events: we now know how to prevent the spread of those diseases to a greater extent. While other outbreaks loom (Ebola) and AIDS is a case where we know how to prevent it, but millions are still infected every year, we have been unable to prevent genocide and mass atrocity and there is no present indication that this will change any time soon. Even a future deadly virus has the potential to be

plague[26] have been. Regardless, a theodicist not only is challenged to avoid justifying the unjustifiable, but must name what cannot be justified, thus acknowledging a theodicy's limitations or failures.Dominican John Tauler, who lived during "natural disasters, endemic warfare, persecutions of the Jews, and the Black Death that killed almost half the population in large parts of Europe",[27] could 'reasonably' utter in a sermon: "Whatever might happen to cause you distress – all this molds you and serves to make you a noble and joyful person. It has been completely ordained by God that this should happen to you".[28] Such claims are not applicable in the contemporary context of mass atrocity. According to Filip Müller (survivor of the Auschwitz-Birkenau *Sonderkommando*), twenty-year old Menachem, while in the crematoria, "flung these hard words in his former religious teacher's face:…'[N]ot once have I felt divine justice here. Absolutely everything that you stuffed into my head in school was just nonsense. There is no God, and if there is one, he is an ox and a bastard!'"[29] A viable theodic position uncomfortably inhabits a space between these two poles, as the magnitude of evil demands theological humility, caution, and a greater capacity to listen and learn.

Turning to how to analyse witness testimonies, I now need to address the issue of what to call these texts that will serve as challengers and refiners to the project of theodicy. In the next two sections, therefore, I will examine various classifications of texts that depict these traumatic ruptures and will address the issue of incorporating heterogenous historical atrocities in this work and how that bears on the question of uniqueness.

C. The Politics of Naming: How to Read 'Genre'

Classifying any work is an act of interpretation that can persuade others how to read or analyse it. The debate of whether Elie Wiesel's *Night* is deemed fiction or non-

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contained (based on past precedent). That is not the case with genocide (especially without military intervention, which does not heal the division). Who among us would contend (after present genocides are somehow 'contained') that no future genocide will ever occur again?

25. Charles C. Mann in *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus* includes estimates by one researcher that "disease claimed the lives of 80 to 100 million [Native Americans] by the first third of the seventeenth century". Note that such numbers vary widely and so are best considered "approximations" (New York: Vintage, 2006), 105. In regards to the term "Native American" and other "loaded words" see Mann, "Appendix A", 387-92.

26. Maria Kelly in *The Great Dying: The Black Death in Dublin*, states that plagues wiped out "some 50 million Europeans between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries" (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), 9.

27. Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism,* ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 379.

28. John Tauler, "Sermon 3", in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism,* 381.

29. Filip Müller, *"Eyewitness to Auschwitz": Ten Years in the Gas Chambers*, trans.

fiction is but one of sundry examples on the difficulties of classifying a text. Hybrid texts in particular challenge rigid classifications, and some of the works I will examine, like Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School*, contain this hybridity. Despite these acknowledged difficulties, I will refer to these texts as testimonies of mass atrocity.

As a general category, texts depicting atrocity have gone by many names beyond memoir or autobiography: testimonio[30], testimonial literature, witness testimony and literature,[31] literature of freedom, literature of survival,[32] resistance literature,[33] literature of atrocity,[34] and literature of trauma[35] – along with specific titles such as Holocaust literature, gulag literature, and so on. The literary critic John Beverley asks in his opening to "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio (Testimonial Narrative)": "Do social struggles give rise to new forms of literature, or is it more a question of the adequacy of their representation in existing narrative forms such as the short story or the novel?"[36] As an answer to this type of question, Wiesel writes: "If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony".[37] Agreeing with Wiesel, I will employ the term 'testimony' for these

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Susanne Flatauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 66.

30. The testimonio, conceived in Latin American political and literary circles, is often considered the root of this genre – or in some cases an entirely separate one. Many literary critics, like Georg Gugelberger, agree with Elzbieta Sklodowska's assertion that the "testimonio remains undefined" ["Spanish American Testimonial Novel. Some Afterthoughts", in *The Read Thing*, ed. Georg *Gugelberger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 84]. However, in the early stages of the debate, John Beverly in his article "Margin at the Center" is often cited as the 'definer' of the genre: "By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet that is printed as opposed to acoustic form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also a real protagonist or witness of the event he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. *Testimonio* may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following categories, some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not: autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, *novella-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or 'factographic literature'" [John Beverly, "The Margin at the Center", in *The Real Thing*, 25].

31. Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust*, xii.

32. Michael R. Steele uses this term while discussing Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi's book *By Words Alone: the Holocaust in Literature* in his *Christianity, Tragedy, and Holocaust Literature* (57). He also refers to the "literature of victims" (65).

33. See Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1987).

34. Michael R. Steele also refers to the "literature of mass atrocity" (9, 66) and quotes Lawrence Langer's term for "literature of atrocity" [*Christianity, Tragedy, and Holocaust Literature*, 42].

35. See Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17.

36. Beverley, "Margin", 23. For further discussion on the testimonio, see George Yúdice, "Testimonio and Postmodernism", in *The Real Thing,* ed. Georg *M. Gugelberger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). For contrary views on the definition, see Elzbieta Sklodowska. "Spanish American Testimonial Novel. Some Afterthoughts", in *The Real Thing*, 84.

37. Quoted from Shoshana Feldman, "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching", in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New

texts, though such a term still needs clarification and definition, as debates remain on whether to distinguish oral and written testimony and where testimony diverges from autobiography. Other distinctions involve debates on whether testimonies are predominantly an individual or communal witness[38] and whether the literature of testimony is a different sub-group.[39]

Zoë Vania Waxman in *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* has also argued for a greater need to recognise that Holocaust testimony in particular is not a homogenous literary or historical field, and to do so, is to minimise crucial distinctions that can help us gain greater comprehension of the Holocaust.[40] She writes:

> Life in the concentration camps was very different from that in the ghettos, and the horrors encountered presented a major obstacle to survivors writing their memoirs – particularly when conveying the death of the self, which they experienced on arrival at the camps. Also, the brutality of the *Kapos* in the concentration camp attests to the heterogeneity of Holocaust experiences.[41]

Thus, there needs to be distinctions within the distinctions.

Despite some of these tensions, the term testimony is specific and comprehensive enough to represent a wide-range of works. It also connotes some key features unique to the genre. As Paul Ricoeur notes, "when the test of conviction becomes the price of life, the witness changes his name. *Martus* in Greek means 'witness'. Such a connection slightly shifts the grounds of testimony from what only occurs in the court room to one's living out one's life as a means of testifying – as if

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York: Routledge, 1992), 6. Georg M. Gugelberger, on the other hand, asserts in his "Introduction" to *The Real Thing,* that the testimonios' inclusion in the canon has been a sign of betrayal and is another "form of colonialization" (13).

38. This difference can also be attested to in the multiple forces that influence a testimony. Zoë Vania Waxman writes: "Testimony is mediated by both the concerns of collective memory and the concerns of the individual survivor, the latter often writing as an act of atonement or even exorcism in an attempt to assimilate overwhelming memories" [*Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158]. See also Orly Lubin, "Holocaust Testimony, National Memory", in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, 130-41.

39. Works of fiction that incorporate testimonies from actual survivors or historical documents straddle a fine line between fiction and non-fiction. See, for example, Marta Traba, *Mothers and Shadows* (London: Readers International, 1993) and Atiq Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, trans. Erdag M. Goknar (London: Vintage, 2003). James E. Young writes: "Where the nonfiction account attempts to retrieve its authentic connection to events in order to reinforce its documentary authority, fiction necessarily fabricates its link in order to reinforce its documentary authority" ["Holocaust Documentary Fiction", in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 212].

40. Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust,* 188.

41. Ibid., 87.

one's whole life is a part of a trial – or witnessing to a cause or truth".[42]

Thus, calling these works 'testimonies' seems appropriate, especially in drawing upon its etymology in witnessing (and consequently, as martyr) with its strong legal connection to testify in court, to cull forth the truth; and in religious language, to bear witness to God. As Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw write: "Testimony attempts to bridge the gap between suffering individuals and ultimately communities of listeners, whose empathic response can be palliative, if not curative".[43] Theodicy is also preoccupied (and mired) in bridging gaps (for what greater abyss can there seem to be than between the existence of genocide or the devastation of an earthquake and the argument for an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God?). Therefore, pairing witness testimony and theodicy may help to bridge certain caesuras, or at the least, come to better acknowledge and face such gaps.

Adding the term 'atrocity' remains somewhat problematic. What is 'atrocious' to one may not be so to another, but the underlying premise here is that suffering and death are an indelible part of this world. We all suffer and we all will die, but some types of suffering and some types of deaths because of their brazen attack on the dignity of the human person (and it can be argued, the well-being of other sentient beings) are deemed particularly tragic and cruel. In *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*, Claudia Card writes:

> Why take atrocities as paradigms? Many evils lack the scale of an atrocity…I choose them for three reasons: (1) because they are uncontroversially evil, (2) because they deserve priority of attention,…and (3) because the core features of evils tend to be writ large in the case of atrocities….[44]

Card, therefore, states that identifying an atrocity is not a subjective claim (an issue I will return to in Chapter Ten) but correctly points to why atrocities demand a specified focus. The Oxford English Dictionary, for example, defines an 'atrocity' as "1. savage enormity; horrible or heinous wickedness. . . 3. an atrocious deed, an act of extreme cruelty and heinousness". While helpful, the definition still does not

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42. Paul Ricoeur writes: "Testimony is also the engagement of a pure heart and an engagement to the death. It belongs to the tragic destiny of truth. . .[it is] an action, a work, the movement of a life insofar as these things constitute by themselves the mark and the living proof of a man's conviction and devotion to a cause. . . Testimony no longer designates an action of speech, the oral report of an eyewitness about a fact to which he was witness. Testimony is the action itself as it attests outside of himself, to the interior man, to his conviction, to his faith" ["The Hermeneutics of Testimony", in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 129-130].

43. Miller and Tougaw, "Introduction", 11.

44. Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, 9.

necessarily place clear, uncontroversial limits to what may and may not be deemed an atrocity. Are the deaths of children from disease or starvation an atrocity? (an issue addressed in Chapter Six). Is it callous, for example, to say a child's death from SIDS[45] is not shockingly wicked, but sadly, perhaps even more tragically, a fairly 'common' occurrence? Because Card "does not define evil by motive", she contends that her "atrocity paradigm encourages a focus first on suffering. Harm is what is most salient about atrocities".[46] She is pointing to the fact that some "perpetrators commonly do not understand their deeds as atrocities".[47] Regardless of whether an atrocity can be clearly deemed an intentional act or not by human beings, its assault on lives and the meaning of this world still challenges the aims of any theodicy. Moreover, while circumstances are always crucial, if the death of a child from SIDS is not deemed an 'atrocity,' one can still ask whether such a death is also a valid reason to question the existence of a loving God.[48] Atrocities make such questions more pointed, but they are not the only grounds for such doubt and recriminations.

Returning to the issue of magnitude, how significant is the adjective "mass" before atrocity? Does this addition cause any further moral or philosophical problems for the theodicist particularly based on the limitations of human justice? If it is true that the death of one innocent child is enough reason to question the entire purpose and role of God and creation (á la Ivan Karamazov), then what further value comes from discussion of the genocide in Sudan or the Srebrenica massacre? The magnitude of these evils, in fact, is often cited by antitheodicists as reason to disavow any theodicy. Geoffrey Hartman, for example, writes of the "impossibility of theodicy",[49] while Primo Levi remarks: "There is Auschwitz, so there cannot be God".[50]

By focusing on the most heinous acts of evil, my aim is also to include all forms of evil, though differentiating the scale, intent, and destruction of the acts. Thus, by asking how one can still speak of a loving God despite the killing fields of

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45. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

46. Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, 9.

47. Ibid., 9.

48. Although I predominantly focus on human-inflicted evil on a massive scale, I will touch upon the problems raised by so-called 'natural evil' in Chapter Six through my analysis of Jon Sobrino's *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope.*

49. Geoffrey Hartman, "Elie Wiesel and the Morality of Fiction", in *Obliged by Memory*, 109.

50. Quoted in Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 44. For a discussion of this quote and Levi's subsequent modification of it, see the chapter "The Ethics of Prayer", in Roth, *Ethics During And After the Holocaust*, 145.

Cambodia, one asks similar types of questions if a child dies in a car accident or a father of two young children succumbs from cancer. It is questioning simultaneously the tragic suffering of Little Eleanora and the roughly twenty million others murdered during the Stalin and Post-Stalin regimes. Therefore, where an individual tragedy may cause the theodicist sufficient difficulty, how much more so a mass atrocity? For these reasons and in this sense, I name these texts "testimonies of mass atrocity".

Because this work will weave testimonies from various historical tragedies – or historical "monstrosities" (to paraphrase Ignaz Maybaum's term[51]) – I now need to address the extant debate on the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust and other mass atrocities.

D. The Dilemma of Uniqueness

In *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur,* Ben Kiernan shows how "Genocides not only exhibit similarities, many are actual related events. Their relationships are often personal and generational".[52] Recognising shared patterns and features that have often caused various genocides, genocide "moments" or "genocide atrocities", need not, however, detract from the issue of uniqueness. As Kiernan adds, "[I]f each was unique and some were extreme, historical connections and themes appeared".[53]

On the issue of the Holocaust's uniqueness Steven Katz writes: "…I would argue that, in fact, 'The Holocaust is phenomenologically unique by virtue of the fact that never before has a state set out, as a matter of intentional principle and actualized policy, to annihilate physically every man, woman, and child belonging to a specific people'".[54] Kiernan makes a similar claim:

> History's most extreme case of genocide is clearly unique in several ways. A state-sponsored attempt at total extermination by industrialized murder of unarmed millions has no parallel before or since. The wholesale destruction of the Jews, and the invasion of most of Europe and the USSR that made it possible, required an advanced economy and a heavily armed

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51. Ignaz Maybaum, *Ignaz Maybaum: A Reader,* ed. Nicholas de Lange (New York: Berghan Press, 2001), 160. Maybaum uses the word "monstrosity" to distinguish from "tragedy" and to underline the actions of humanity in causing such suffering.

52. Kiernan, Blood and Soil, 35.

53. Ibid., 5.

54. Steven Katz, "Introduction" to "Part Three: European and American Responses During and Following the War" in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After*

> modern state. Yet the Nazi killing machine also had a more antiquated power source. It was operated by interlocking ideological levers that celebrated race, territory, cultivation, and history.[55]

As noted above, one may still defend the relevance of the category of uniqueness while juxtaposing and comparing various historical tragedies. As Harold Runblom has argued in *The Genocidal Temptation: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda, and Beyond*, "A paradigm shift seems to be under way, which is a healthy sign. Research and the dissemination of new knowledge and reflection about the Holocaust have stimulated the study of other genocides, and vice versa. The comparative approach…provides a better platform for understanding both of the Nazi plans to eliminate the Jews and their implementation, and of other genocides".[56] Darrell Fasching adds: "If we are to understand the human capacity for the demonic we need to see what is both unique and what is generalizable in each case".[57] Similarly, Eric Markusen argues: "To those who are offended by the placement of the strategic and atomic bombing campaigns in the same analytic context as the Holocaust, I would emphasize that *comparing* two events is not the same as *equating* them or considering them as equivalent".[58] Summing up some of these distinctions, Michael Wyschogrod, in his essay "Faith and the Holocaust", remarks: "It is necessary to recognize that, from any universally humanistic framework, the destruction of European Jewry is one notable chapter in the long record of man's inhumanity against man, a record which compels the Holocaust to resign itself to being, at most, a first among equals".[59]

I agree with Markusen and Fasching on the need to compare historical atrocities. Such comparisons, as Kiernan shows, place an atrocity in proper historical context in order to come to a better understanding of its causes, mechanisms, influences, and consequences. For Kiernan, recognising such patterns may also increase "the possibility of preventing future genocides with timely action".[60] Based on Katz's criteria, I would argue that the 1994 genocide in Rwanda

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the Holocaust, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 367.

55. Kiernan, *Blood and Soil,* 454.

56. Harold Runblom, "Foreword", in *The Genocidal Temptation: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda, and Beyond,* ed. Robert S. Frey (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), xii.

57. Darrell J. Fasching, "Ethics After Auschwitz and Hiroshima" in *The Genocidal Temptation*, 5.

58. Eric Markusen, "Reflections on the Holocaust and Hiroshima", in *The Genocidal Temptation*, 27.

59. Michael Wyschogrod, "Faith and the Holocaust", in *Wrestling With God,* 460.

60. Kiernan, *Blood and Soil*, 6.

alters some of his description above. As John Roth notes, while the genocide never reached a point of killing all Tutsis outside Rwanda, from the Hutus' standpoint, the "'logic' of genocide in Rwanda meant that it would be desirable, if possible, for all the Tutsis in Rwanda, and arguably, elsewhere to disappear from the face of the earth as well".[61] However, Kiernan's inclusion of the industrial, technological, and military factors that enabled the Nazi government to implement its policies in Europe and the USSR attests to that atrocity's unparalleled scope and uniqueness. Thus, the issue of uniqueness remains relevant, but it can be better argued when "monstrosities" are juxtaposed and compared.

While the purpose of this work is to turn to a wide variety of witness testimony to examine theodicy, we will also come upon penetrating insights from testimonies that provide useful means to compare and contrast the methods and aims of the perpetrators and the interpretations and survival-tactics of victims from otherwise diverse and unique historical tragedies. I still need, however, to justify why these texts can still be relied upon as 'evidence' and to elucidate why we need to assess these texts with respect, but not excessive piety. As noted with the quote from Moshe Unna, some critics and detractors question the truth and factual accuracy of these works because their authors were often traumatised during their experiences. Such trauma often wrecks or limits the reliability of memory and one's sense of a stable identity. Because of this, I need to establish the methodological criteria for how and why we can still trust the author's interpretations of these events while also acknowledging that the author's descriptions are not infallible. I also need to address why many of us revere these witness testimonies, but may not integrate their warnings and truths within our spiritual practices, philosophies, and worldviews – often with negative (if not catastrophic) consequences.

To begin to address these methodological issues, I will turn to Ruth Leys's *Trauma: A Genealogy* to encounter some of the different meanings of this confused, but important term.[62] I will then examine the issue of traumatised memory, the process of forming a coherent depiction of these horrific experiences, and the difficulties a critic has in analysing these interpretations of raw, often devastating events.

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61. John Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust*, 154).

62. In *Remembering Trauma*, Richard McNally writes: "How victims remember trauma is the most divisive issue facing psychology today" [(Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 1].

III. Trauma

A. Bearing the Wound With the Scar[63]

Whether discussing a victim of rape or the experiences of a survivor of torture, we often describe a victim's ordeal as 'traumatic'. In "Our Children are Killing Us", Elizabeth Rubin details the trauma of children who were abducted by members of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda.[64] These children were forced to serve as 'wives' and fighters, resulting in torture and death if they disobeyed and tried to escape, reinforced by having to "hack to death, with hoes, axes, and branches, a recently kidnapped girl who had been caught trying to escape". At a trauma centre for surviving children, the centre teaches group therapy through "reenactments of life in the Bush . . . all designed to teach the children to forget. It is a challenging concept: remembering to forget".[65] Few would discount these experiences as traumatic, and yet as Ruth Leys notes in her *Trauma: A Genealogy,* the word 'trauma' is often used indiscriminately so that "it is hard not to feel that the concept of trauma has became debased currency".[66]

Cathy Caruth has written that "the original meaning of *trauma* itself (in both English and German), the Greek *trauma*, or 'wound,' originally referred to an injury inflicted on the body",[67] while Leys notes that "trauma was originally the term for a surgical wound, conceived on the model of a rupture of the skin or protective envelope of the body resulting in a catastrophic global reaction in the entire organism".[68] However, the locus of the wound – whether the mind or body – has been a continual area of disagreement among psychologists. According to Leys, while the shell-shocked soldier of WWI, the combat fatigue associated with WWII, or the 'chronic concentration camp syndrome or survivor's syndrome' in the Post-Holocaust (and gulag) era was documented, trauma was not widespread and accepted until a number of influential social workers, psychologists, and activists responded to the high number of American soldiers returning traumatised from Vietnam. PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder) was first recognised as an ailment

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63. In *The Tremendum*, Arthur Cohen writes that those of us who come after the Holocaust, "bear the scar without the wound" [(New York: Continuum, 1980), 2].

64. For a recent memoir of a child soldier from Uganda, see Grace Akallo and Faith H. McDonnell, *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2007).

65. Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 1.

66. Ibid., 2.

67. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 2.

68. Leys, *Trauma*, 19.

by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980. According to Leys, it was defined as:

> fundamentally a disorder of memory. The idea is that, owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or disassociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented *as* past, but is perpetually experienced in a painful, disassociated traumatic present.[69]

Symptoms characteristic of PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, and other re-experiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal (what can often be called psychosomatic symptoms), explosive violence or tendency to hypervigilise (overly sensitive to sights or sounds).[70]

Because many victims rely upon their memory to reconstruct or interpret what has happened to them, how reliable is this memory, which like the body and the self, is also traumatised? Can these memories be trusted?[71] And if not, how can they be considered reliable indicators as evidence against a loving God or proof of a loving God amidst evil?

B. Re-inscribing the Self: Traumatised Memory

Memory is indispensable for the project of witnessing – but it is also the domain that trauma seems to attack mercilessly, leaving a victim fraught with mnemonic fissures, gaps, and irreparable damage. Memory is depended upon to testify to what was experienced as well as blamed for its variable reliability, a characteristic that deniers and doubters are quick to raise. In this section, I will examine the conflicting interpretations of the reliability of memories among survivors of the camps, and how many genocidal regimes implemented policies to control or block the memories of victims and perpetrators. Such attempts sought to determine how an individual (if able to survive) could then interpret what he or she experienced or

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69. Ibid., 2.

70. Ibid., 2. Since this definition, the application and terminology has extended to fields beyond war in adopting the best approaches for treatment, as seen for example, in cases with child abuse or victims of natural disasters (ibid., 4-5).

committed.

"Without memories", Diane Ackerman writes, "we wouldn't know who we are, how we once were, who we'd like to be in the memorable future. We are the sum of our memories. They provide a continuous private sense of one's self. Change your memory and you change your identity".[72] One can immediately see then the problems raised when words and thoughts cannot be trusted or seem to fail to describe what has happened – or there are no witnesses left to remember. This type of doubt and scepticism is in part what many despotic regimes anticipate, as they attempt to destroy memory by annihilating a victim's identity. In *Gulag*, Anne Appelbaum documents how "many former prisoners believe that their first few hours in captivity were deliberately designed to shock them, to render them incapable of coherent thought".[73]

Such a process often had another practical cause. Franz Stangl, commander of Treblinka, admitted to Gitta Sereny that the treatment of camp inmates was designed to "condition those who actually had to carry out the policies. To make it possible for them to do what they did".[74] Further incentive for the guards to act includes patriotic or, even benevolent motivation, often linked to what Peter Haas calls a "Nazi ethic".[75] For example, while referring to the mass killings, Himmler acknowledged to members of the SS: "We have accomplished the most difficult task out of love for our people. And we have not suffered any damage to our inner self, our soul, and our character".[76] Notice the cooption of moral and religious terms in order to couch genocidal acts.

Such brazen words are spoken with the conviction that no intended victims will survive these "difficult tasks" and that the world will be indifferent or refuse to believe the survivor's story. The process incorporates an attempt to destroy the memory of the victim's present to prevent any mobilisation for action in the future while controlling how the guards interpret such acts for their future sanity and well-being. These regimes aim to distort one's future memory before certain events even occur.

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71. Critiquing the assertion of a mechanism of repression, Richard J. McNally writes that "people remember horrific experiences all too well. Victims are seldom incapable of remembering their trauma" [*Remembering Trauma*, 2].

72. Diane Ackerman, *An Alchemy of the Mind* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 76.

73. Applebaum, *Gulag*, 131.

74. Ibid., xxxvii.

75. See Peter J. Haas, "Science and the Determination of the Good", in *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses*, ed. John K. Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 49-59. See also the subsequence critiques and Haas's response, 60-89.

76. Quoted from Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust*, 84.

While Inga Clendinnen notes how "even honest eyewitnesses can get things wrong, and not all eyewitnesses are honest, or not all the time",[77] in his essay "After the Holocaust", Aharon Appelfeld writes that in the camps

> We would sit for hours and observe. Hunger, thirst, and weakness made us observant creatures. Rather than the murderers, we observed their victims, in their weaknesses and in their heroism. Those tortured faces on the brink of the chasm will not be forgotten. To 'be forgotten' is not the correct expression. They were stamped upon us the way childhood is stamped upon the matrix of one's flesh.[78]

However, Appelfeld, in his memoir *The Story of a Life*, also acknowledges that articulating such experiences remains a lifelong challenge:

> The reader should not expect a sequential and precise account in this story of a life. These are regions of my life that have been packed together in memory, and they are alive and pulsing. Much has been lost and much corroded by oblivion. At first it seemed that very little remained, and yet, when I laid one piece alongside another, I saw that not only have they been made whole by the years, but they have even achieved some level of meaning.[79]

So, too Primo Levi, despite asserting the factors in the camps that obliterate memories, insists: "I conserve pathologically precise memories of my encounters in that now remote world".[80] Thus, many of the same survivors can be cited to support or question the reliability of memory. However, that some instances may be forgotten or misrepresented does not belie the fact that some memories remain irrefutable and factual even if they are only bodily-felt.

In this context, Appelfeld and Levi assert the truth and inviolability of some of their memories, while Holocaust survivor Bruno Bettelheim emphasises how difficult it was to remember in the camps, as one was malnourished, exhausted, and emotionally, mentally, and physically barraged from the daily onslaught of concentration camp existence. Though Bettelheim repeated events to himself every day so he wouldn't forget, "concentration camp life clearly had a detrimental effect on the memory".[81]

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77. Ibid., 23.

78. Aharon Appelfeld, "After the Holocaust", in *Writing about the Holocaust*, 91.

79. Aharon Appelfeld, *The Story of a Life*, trans. Aloma Halter (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005), ix.

80. Quoted in Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* , 48.

81. Quoted in Douwe Draaisma, *Why Life Speeds Up as You Get Older: How Memory*

Memory was also hampered by the unwritten camp rule: "Thou shalt not look: The situation had a perverse logic: to know what you may not see you have to look, and in order to know what, you must pretend you must know what you actually saw".[82] These observations, in addition to statements of survivors such as Ellie Cohen in his *The Abyss* that in the camps: "You couldn't recognize anyone anymore" and that "I should be quite unable to testify at a trial of SS-men",[83] make subsequent retellings always, at the least, questionable, especially if these memories are thirty, forty, or fifty years old.[84] Such a description of memory's failings would seem to render these accounts completely unreliable, but as we saw above, while one person's memory may be weak, another's may be unerringly accurate. One cannot discount all such memories.

To account for these conditions and minimise criticism about the reliability of Holocaust testimonies, James E. Young argues that what Holocaust testimony offers us is "knowledge – not evidence – of events".[85] This means that in these testimonies, there may be some discrepancy with parts of the historical record, but as an overall witness to the atrocities committed, the insights and descriptions of these memoirs illuminate and reveal otherwise unknown or contested historical ground. Zoë Vania Waxman also reminds us that there have been testimonies written in the midst of the atrocities which can be considered for factual content. She quotes Chaim Kaplan, a "teacher and diarist of the Warsaw ghetto",[86] who writes that his testimonies "can guarantee the factualness of these manifestations because *I dwell among my people*".[87]

It is only reasonable to conclude that despite the failure of memory in some cases, especially in traumatic experiences where an atrocity has occurred, the memory of such experiences remains a reliable and indispensable means to ascertain events that would otherwise be concealed by the perpetrators of injustice. These testimonies, therefore, are interpretations of historical and traumatic events whose veracity may not be entirely verifiable but which still can be considered as 'factual'

Shapes Our Past, trans. Arnold and Erica Pomerans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119.

82. Ibid., 119.

83. Ibid., 121.

84. For an argument on the benefits of writing about these experiences after sufficient time has elapsed see Shlomo Breznitz, "The Advantage of Delay: A Psychological Perspective on Memoirs of Trauma", in *Obliged by Memory,* 43-51. Breznitz's Holocaust memoir is *Memory Fields* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

85. Quoted from Tal, *Literature of Trauma*, 48.

86. Vania Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 11.

87. Ibid., 48.

and 'experienced' by the victim. To doubt otherwise would be radically to question the basic underlying principle of trust that pervades our world.[88]

This approach seems rational and sufficient to argue for including these texts within the theodic discussion. Witnesses of mass atrocity, however, must not only disentangle key details from the blurry mass of their traumatic memories, but must face the maelstrom of violence and misery of the past to articulate a meaning understandable to outsiders.

C. The Trauma of Re-Creation: Depicting Atrocity

Articulating the meaning of these traumatic experiences often remains frustratingly elusive. Appelfeld writes: "Memory, it seems, has deep roots in the body. Sometimes just the smell of rotting straw, or the sharp call of a bird, is enough to take me back, piercing me deep inside. I say inside, although I still haven't found the words to give voice to those intense scars on my memory".[89] Regarding this dilemma, Lawrence Langer remarks: "One of the main problems of the Holocaust writer is to find a secure place, somewhere between memory and imagination, for all those corpses, who like the ghost of Hamlet's father, cry out against the injustice of their end, but for whom no act of vengeance or ritual of remembrance exists sufficient to bring them to a peaceful state of rest".[90] This secure place notwithstanding, the psychological and traumatic residue left from the experience is aggravated by the problem of language and the guilt of survival. Such a 'crying out' can also be for that lost self now shattered, the 'integrated' self that existed before the crime was perpetrated. This experience is exacerbated with the realisation that the outside world is basically unchanged.

At the core of these testimonies is the seemingly vast void of the meaning of words before and after these traumatic events and how this gap complicates a witness' intention to interpret, describe, and report these atrocities to the outside world. As Wiesel writes: "Often I wonder: have I sufficiently emphasized my doubts on the capacity to transmit what we have endured or received, memories of

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88. In Richard Swinburne's *Is There a God?*, Swinburne refers to the principle of credulity and the principle of testimony. The former means "we ought to believe that things are as they seem to be (in the epistemic sense) unless and until we have evidence that we are mistaken" [(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996),
132], while the latter means that "those who do not have an experience of a certain type ought to believe any others when they say they do – again, in the absence of evidence of deceit or delusion" (134).

89. Appelfeld, *Story of a Life*, 50.

90. Quoted from Tal, *Literature of Trauma,* 82.

fear and fire, in words, just in words?"[91] In this section, therefore, I will highlight examples of how language has been adulterated by various despotic regimes which in turn coerce many of their victims to adopt or adapt to this new, morally-perverse language. I will also examine the relationship of many atrocities to literary, religious, or mythological texts and whether these 'similarities' are a means to locate and ground survivors' memories and the means to interpret or convey their experiences or whether these mythological stories instead fail to express the full truth of these experiences and so point further to the searing isolation many victims endure. Lawrence Langer has written that the Holocaust survivor "must first invent a whole new mode of speaking in order to articulate his subject. . . to create a language and imagery that will transform mere language into vision and bear the reader beyond the realm of familiar imagining into the bizarre limbo of atrocity".[92] This creation of what seems a new language forms and intermingles at various levels, from the prisoners themselves to the authoritarian regime trying to forge their own ideology and conceal the atrocities they authorise. Here is a transcript from a monitored radio broadcast during the fall of Srebrenica:

> 14:17 P.M. Anonymous soldier: Legenda [Milan Jovovíc, head of the Drina Wolves, Bosnian Serbs reconnaissance unit[93]] I have thirty pieces.
>
> Legenda: Finish with it. You know we are paid by the piece.
>
> 14:47 P.M. Anonymous soldier: Boss, the job is done.[94]

Similarly, Immaculée Ilibagiza relates how her brother (who was later murdered) repeated to her the orders given to a group of Hutu killers before they went on a rampage massacring Tutsis: "This house is full of cockroaches – fumigate it! What are you waiting for? You have a job to do! It's time to stop these cockroaches!"[95] In the prisons of North Korea where individuals like Soon Ok Lee were horrifically tortured, it was "a place where 'the animals that do not have tails' lived".[96] Such language and 'truth' claims are indelibly intertwined with political power as the victim loses all rights and has to contend against the so-called 'infallible' State. This 'State' then determines one's value and worth. Human beings

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91. Elie Wiesel, "Afterword", in *Obliged by Memory*, 157.
92. Quoted from Tal, *Literature of Trauma*, 81.
93. Legenda is Milan Jovovíc, head of the Drina Wolves, Bosnian Serbs reconnaissance unit. See Elizabeth Neuffer, *The Key to My Neighbor's House: Seeking Justice in Bosnia and Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 2001), 143.
94. Ibid., 206.
95. Immaculée Ilibagiza, with Steve Erwin, *Left to Tell, Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (Carlsbad: Hay House, 2006), 62.
96. Soon Ok Lee, *Eyes of the Tailless Animals*, 9.

are deemed 'cockroaches' or 'tailless animals', and so can be treated as such. As James Baldwin writes: "speech and language, however ceremonious, complex, and convoluted, are a way of revealing one's nakedness, and this revelation is really our only hope. But this hope is strangled if one, or both of us, is lying".[97] Such 'lying' is routine in these systems of terror built into the fabric of its philosophy and ethos. Their pronouncements are lies that confiscate words of hope and goodness and rind them of all value until their old meanings are eclipsed by the new ones. Thus, a human being is a 'piece' whose murder (deemed a commodity) is euphemised as a 'job'.

Alicia Partnoy, who had been kidnapped, imprisoned, and tortured at a "Little School" in Argentina during the "dirty war", writes how one day "the guards told me they were taking me to 'see the radishes grow' a euphemism for death and burial".[98] Notice that in these death worlds, life gets rewritten by death. A radish as potential nourishment and food now stands for murder and execution. A school is a site of torture and mutilation. The journalist Stanley Schanberg remarks: "With their cruelty, the Khmer Rouge brought a new language – words with a dehumanized ring, a mechanical robot-like quality, euphemism for atrocity, words that people had never heard before…People were called *opaker* or 'instrument.' The Khmer nation was called 'machine' from the French or English – strange for a government trying to erase the colonial past".[99]

Regarding the genocide in Rwanda, Philip Gourevitch similarly relates: "A councilwoman in one Kigali neighborhood was reported to have offered fifty Rwandan francs apiece (about thirty cents at the time) for severed Tutsi heads, a practice known as 'selling cabbages'".[100] Here we see the same adulteration of the meaning for food as we saw in Partnoy's testimony from Argentina. Sometimes they are mere coincidences, but often enough it is because these regimes share information or study what previous ones have implemented for their own perverse ends. Harry Wu, survivor of the Chinese *Laogai*, recounts the following story when he visited the concentration camp at Dachau in Germany: "I went out through the front gate, where I noticed the slogan on the iron grillwork: *ARBEIT MACHT FREI.* I asked somebody to translate it and was told, 'Labor makes (you) free.' I was

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97. James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 43.

98. Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1998), 15.

99. Sydney H. Schanberg, *The Death and Life of Dith Pran* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 49.

100. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories From Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 115.

stunned and I asked, 'Are you sure?' and my friend said yes. I said, 'In China, the slogan for our camps was 'Labor makes a new life.'"[101] Anyone who has read survivor testimonies from different despotic regimes or perpetrators of injustice will attest to the eerily similar methods, rationalisations, and philosophy that undergird such systems.[102]

Moreover, a perpetrator's propaganda often works all too well, forcing victims to echo this language and thus conceal many crimes and truths. Kang Chol-Hwan, a survivor of the North Korean gulag, quotes a fellow prisoner who had to address other gulag inmates before finally being released after ten years of imprisonment: "Due to the grace of our great leader, the comrade Kim Il-sung, we will be free in spite of our former crimes. We thank the party from the bottom of our hearts and will do all in our power to be worthy of its decision". Chol-Hwan notes the prisoner concealed any hint of hatred as he said these obviously ingratiating lies.[103]

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101. Harry Wu, *Troublemaker: One Man's Crusade Against China's Cruelty* (New York: Random House, 1996), 185.

102. In Anne Applebaum's *Gulag: A History,* she outlines a brief historical sketch of concentration camps, defined as camps built for a particular type of non-criminal civilian prisoner. She writes:

> According to this definition, the first modern concentration camps were first setup…in colonial Cuba in 1895. . . In an effort to put an end to a series of local insurgencies, Imperial Spain began to prepare a policy of *reconcentración*, intended to remove the Cuban peasants from their land and 'reconcentrate' them in camps. . .By 1900, the Spanish term *reconcentración* had already been translated into English, and was used to describe a similar British project. . . during the Boer War in South Africa: Boer civilians were 'concentrated' into camps, in order to deprive Boer combatants of shelter and support.
>
> From there, the idea spread further. It certainly seems, for example, as if the term *kontslager* first appeared in Russian as a translation from the English 'concentration camp,' probably thanks to Trotsky's familiarity with the history of the Boer War. In 1904, German colonists in German South-West Africa also adopted the British model – with one variation. Instead of merely locking up the region's native inhabitants, a tribe called the Herero, they made them carry out forced labor on behalf of the German colony.
>
> There are a number of strange and eerie links between these first German-African labor camps and those built by the Nazis three decades later. . .It was thanks to these southern African labor colonies, for example, that the word *Konzentrationslager* first appeared in the German language, in 1905. The first imperial commissioner of Deutsche Sud-West Africa was one Dr. Heinrich Goering, the father of Hermann, who set up the first Nazi camps in 1933. It was also in these African camps that the first German medical experiments were conducted on humans by two of Joseph Mengele's teachers. . . who carried out research on the Herero (ibid., xxxiv).

For other similarities, such as the preponderance of "cold jokes" as torture by despotic regimes, see Glover, *Humanity,* 36-37.

103. The prisoner also added: "A debt of gratitude is also owed to the directors of the Yodak camp, who helped us realize the seriousness of our misdeeds, reeducated us and our families, fed us and cared for us, in the purest spirit of patriotism and revolution". Chol-Hwan testifies to their being forced to eat rats because they were so desperate to eat [*The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, trans. Yair Reiner (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 157].

Prisoners also developed their own form of language. As Sara Nomberg-Przytyk writes: "To some extent all of us were drawn into a bizarre transformation of reality. We knew what those innocent words meant, such as 'gas,' 'selection,' but we uttered them, nevertheless, as though there was nothing hidden behind them".[104] As an example, she takes the word 'organise.' She writes: "Usually it is associated with such positive values as political, social, and cultural order and well-being. . .In Auschwitz, however, 'to organise' meant to improve your own situation, very often at someone else's expense by taking advantage of that person's ignorance or inexperience".[105] Such new meanings and one's ability to adapt to the new language was often the difference between life and death. To survive, prisoners often employed this new language, despite how detrimental it was to one's well-being and moral dignity.[106]

Inevitably once a survivor reencounters the outside world, communicating what seems inexplicable raises further problems. "Notwithstanding my doubts about language", Wiesel admits, "and perhaps because of them, I plunge deeper and deeper into the whirlwind of the words. I try to capture and tame. And I go on writing because I cannot do otherwise".[107] To be silent and say nothing involves a great risk and hope. One hopes that others can utter what one cannot; but it also means an antithetical account could be promulgated that aims to discredit or deny what one would have said. And so one writes, though one is never completely satisfied.

Further complicating one's ability to articulate such horrors is their eerie, but inadequate resonance in many of our foundational religious and mythological stories. Dith Pran, a survivor of the horrors of the Khmer Rouge, remarks: "In the water wells, the bodies were like soup bones in broth. And you could always tell the killing grounds because the grass grew taller and greener where the bodies were

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104. Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales from a Grotesque Land*, trans. Roslyn Hirsch
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 72.

105. Ibid., 72.

106. Similarly, James Baldwin describes how African slaves "came to the United States chained to each other, but from different tribes" who spoke different languages and so "were forced to adopt a language that both was unfamiliar and did not recognise them as human. . .This was not, merely, as in the European example, the adoption of a foreign tongue, but an alchemy that transformed ancient elements into a new language: *A language comes into existence by brutal necessity, and the rules of the language are dictated by what the language must convey*" ["If Black Language Isn't a Language then Tell me, What is?", in *The Price of the Ticket* (London: Michael Joseph, 1985), 650].

107. Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full: Memoirs 1969 - .* Trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 5.

burned".[108] Again, we see that language from the peace-world ironically fills his description. Decaying bodies remind him of a usual pleasure – images of a warm, thick soup. But then the metaphor – even as conceit – is too jarring, Bodies *cannot* be soup, can they? And yet, such stories fill our mythology and history, as in the tale of Thyestes and his brother Atreus.[109] It is no wonder, when our religious and mythological stories are steeped in blood and violation (recall God's order for genocidal killing in the Bible[110] or David's mixed reaction at the news of Tamar's rape by Amnon, whom he favoured as "his fist born"[111]), that they find their mirror image in reality, though there is no tidy meta-narrative within which to place many of these survivor testimonies. Meaning and purpose often remain unknown and illusive. Martin Bormann, the son of Hitler's trusted secretary, relates that Himmler's mistress showed him and other children a room of their house with "tables and chairs made out of parts of human bodies. There was a chair. . . the seat was a human pelvis, the legs human legs – on human feet. [The mistress] then displayed one of a stack of copies of *Mein Kampf*. The covers, she told them, had been made by prisoners in Dachau from human skin, the *Rückenhaut*, the skin of the

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108. Schanberg, *Life and Death,* 53.

109. After Thyestes' extramarital affair with Atreus' wife, Atreus enacted revenge by chopping up his nephews and nieces, the children of Thyestes, and serving them to Thyestes in broth and feast. Ovid tells us Thyestes ate heartily, the solids filling his belly and satisfying his hunger. So, too, do we hear of such a thing in the story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela: Tereus, descendent of Mars, and husband of Procne, raped his wife's sister, Philomela, "a virgin, all alone, and calling / For her father, for her sister, but most often / For the great gods. In vain" (146). Tereus was not finished, though: "He seized her tongue / With pincers. though it cried against the outrage, / Babbled and made a sound something like father, / Till the sword cut it off. . . [Then he] took her, took her again, the injured body / Still giving satisfaction to his lust" [Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humpries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 147].

110. See Joshua 8: 1-29. For disobedience to God's genocidal decree, see 1 Samuel 15. For sparing King Agag of Amalek and the "best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value", Saul loses the Lord's favour, and for all intents and purposes, the kingdom (1 Samuel 15:7). Note he and his troops had slaughtered everyone else but he disobeyed God in not killing everything. Plundering was often considered a worse violation (See Genesis 34 and the rape of Dinah). Many rabbinic commentators, as Meir Sternberg (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*) notes, chastise the brothers of Simeon and Levi who are not the full brothers of Dinah, and did not participate in the killing but later "came upon the slain and plundered the town". As noted in Esther, Hamon is a descendent of Agag's son and therefore a product of Saul's disobedience. By sparing the son as well, rabbis interpreted, taking some textual license, Saul later jeopardised the existence of the Israelites as Hamon sought to murder all of them and would have succeeded if God hadn't saved the people through Esther. It is imperative that the full story of the Bible is borne in mind as one prepares for some type of theodicy. As can already be judged, a theodicy based only on biblical passages is fraught with problems unless one treats contentious ones as radical metaphors, ignores them, or highlight them as exceptions or aberrations no longer morally relevant today. For a biblical survey of types of suffering, see Warren McWilliams, *Where is the God of Justice? Biblical Perspectives on Suffering* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005). Note that citations from the Hebrew Bible refer to translations found in the *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

111. 2 Samuel 13:1-22.

back".[112] Reality, torture, and the absurd uncomfortably mix.

Fictional works (and by analogy, despotic regimes) build and react upon predecessors. In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Ovid's stories (of Thyestes and Atreus and Tereus, Procne, and Philomela) are refashioned and made even more shocking, as Lavinia is raped, has her tongue cut out, her hands chopped off and is mocked: "So now go tell, and if thy tongue can speak, Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravish'd thee" and "Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so. And if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe".[113] Notice even this image cannot simply remain fiction. Almost immediately the modern reader thinks of Sierra Leone[114] or this account from Rwanda:

> 'I had eighteen people killed at my house,' said Etienne Niyonzima, a former businessman who had become a deputy in the National Assembly. 'Everything was totally destroyed – a place of fifty-five meters by fifty meters. In my neighborhood they killed six hundred and forty-seven people. They tortured them, too. You had to see how they killed them. They had the number of everyone's house, and they went through with red paint and marked the homes[115] of all the Tutsis and the Hutu moderates. My wife was at a friend's, shot with two bullets. She is still alive, only' – he fell quiet for a moment – 'she has no arms. The others with her were killed. The militia left her for dead. Her whole family of sixty-five in Gitarama were killed.'[116]

From the mass killings of the Bible, to the mythology poetically retold by Ovid, to Shakespeare's retelling of Ovid, to the 'furniture' at Himmler's mountain retreat near Hitler's Berghof, to the brutal acts committed against civilians in Rwanda and Sierra Leone, it is jarring how rich and various are the historical, biblical, literary, and mythological resources which one can compare, and yet words fail to convey the full truth and experiences of these atrocities. While such examples employ words that – at least by definition – the reader should understand, their new meanings or connotations remain resistant to comprehension and acceptance. Literary critic Kalí Tal writes: "Traumatic experience catalyzes a transformation of meaning in the

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112. Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust,* 94.

113. William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* in *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflon Company, 1974), II.iv.1-4.

114. See Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2007).

115. Are the religious-minded condemned to see correlations between their holy scriptures and traditions (here, Passover) and the evil perpetrated in places like Rwanda? Recall again that 'innocent' Egyptian children would have been killed in the Exodus tale.

signs individuals use to represent their experiences. Words such as blood, terror, agony, and madness gain new meaning, within the context of the trauma, and survivors emerge from the traumatic environment with a new set of definitions".[117] This is an obstacle the survivor must constantly try to overcome. As Elie Wiesel acknowledges: "What can we do to share our visions? Our words can only evoke the incomprehensible. Hunger, thirst, fear, humiliation, waiting, death; for us these words hold different realities. That is the ultimate tragedy of the victims".[118]

Thus, the completed or published memoir is a scion of darkness and confusion, misery and pain; it speaks coherent, even poetic phrases about events that for many seem a blur, a cacophonous nightmare. In many instances, these mere words are a funeral oration, our last link to individuals who were unjustly extinguished from this life. It employs a language that is a medley of the old and new and what had formed from strange, uncomfortable combinations amidst desecration and loss.

Another problem then becomes not only will readers grasp these new meanings or connotations, but whether they want to. Lawrence Langer adds: "We use words to block our fears – liberation of camps means victory – not emaciated bodies".[119] Just as Nomberg-Przytyk criticises herself for accepting the euphemisms of the Nazis – an acceptance of a limited and 'forced' nature – Langer here points out our own complicity in trying to protect our sensibilities and limit our own encounters with these brutal truths of murder and torture.

And so, one must ask, how and by what right does an outside critic, with no relevant experience in these matters, dare to analyse and critique such works?

D. Playing with Corpses: Reading (Dissecting) Texts of Atrocity

Once the survivors find the courage and the means to tell their stories, how should their words be critiqued, especially in light of the difficulties in representing their experiences? Are such texts sacred and untouchable? Because I am arguing that theodicists must engage with and incorporate testimonies of mass atrocity within their theodicies, how to read such texts needs to be examined in some depth here. Michael R. Steele, for example, writing in *Christianity, Culpability, and Belief* challenges: "...[I]f readers make an authentic attempt to understand the message of the literature of atrocity, then it behoves them to do so from a perspective as close as

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116. Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You*, 22.
117. Tal, *Literature of Trauma*, 16.
118. Quoted from ibid., 16.
119. Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 8.

possible to being within the value system used by the Jewish victims who have written about their life in the camps".[120] I take from Steele the need to speak theologically from the vantage point of the poor and the oppressed.[121] And yet, even for the victims, there is no homogenous or infallible voice. As Didier Pollefeyt rightly cautions: "Ethicists need to listen to victims, scientists, and perpetrators, even if the ethical value of these perspectives is very different. Each of these viewpoints has its own contribution to offer, and *each* perspective also has its own limitations...."[122] While one's initial reaction may be to treat these texts as sacred, it is worth recalling that just as many Christians will acknowledge passages or phrases in the Bible that reflect a cultural bias or limitation, it would be problematic to cede total authority to all witnesses of atrocity. Their words must be tested and analysed so some of their interpretations can be fully respected and acknowledged as penetrating truth, while others are held in less regard.

Is it, then, morally permissible to analyse a memoir about the Russian gulag as a literary text? When such victims are no longer alive, as Lawrence Langer asks: "To whom shall we entrust the custody of the public memory of the Holocaust? To the historian? To the survivor? To the critic? To the poet, novelist, or dramatist?. . . All of them re-create the details and images of the events through written texts, and in so doing, remind us that we are dealing with *represented* rather than unmediated reality".[123] Stressing how such texts are interpretations of events does not necessarily detract from their truthfulness, but it exposes these works for scrutiny and critique. Concurrently, exploitation of these stories then becomes a major issue, as these testimonies can then be used for sundry themes and causes, an ethical issue that strikes at the heart of my work, for example.

Initially after the publication of Holocaust memoirs, the general trend was not to treat these texts as literary. However, critics such as James E. Young argued that it was time to give up sacred guardianship while still maintaining sensitivity to the text in order to "explore both the plurality of meanings the Holocaust texts generate and the actions that issue from these meanings outside of the texts". Thus, he aimed to "legitimate discussion of the Holocaust as metaphor, force the recognition that representations of events are always already mediated.... [that] even the Holocaust

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120. Steele, *Christianity, Tragedy, and Holocaust Literature*, 133.

121. This is also a fundamental step for liberation theology, as Chapters Six and Seven will make clear.

122. Didier Pollefeyt, "Pollefeyt's Response to Critiques", in *Ethics After Auschwitz: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses*, ed. John Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 273.

123. Langer, *Ruins*, 39.

can never lie outside of literature, or understanding, or telling".[124] As Kalí Tal notes: "Critical reading can lead not only to further understanding of sacred and modern literary texts, but also a new understanding of the ways our lives and these texts are inextricably bound together".[125]

Because such critical reading can unlock incriminating truths, a politicised battle often results over the publication of these texts, as witnessed with Peter Balakian's memoir about the Armenian genocide[126] or Jan Tomasz Gross's *Neighbours,* depicting a Polish massacre of Jews in the village of Jedwabne. The process of 'demystification', while often illuminating as it shines light on truth and a victim's experiences that were previously unknown, can often be disconcerting and feel morally ambiguous to the modern reader.

To illustrate this tension, Inga Clendinnen writes how: "The Müller example brings into major focus a difficulty in reading witness testimony: how to assess it without piety".[127] She is referring to what Bauer calls "perhaps the most poignant story of any Holocaust testimony". As the oldest member of the Auschwitz and Birkenau *Sonderkommando* (or 'Special Squad')[128] and so witness to the operation of the crematoria, Filip Müller's accounts of the last moments of hundreds of thousands of lives inevitably invokes silence and awe. Regarding Müller's text, however, Clendinnen notes some discrepancies and suspects "the collaborator's hand in the use of the convention of dramatic direct speech reportage for long public speeches from the SS, and more remarkably and rather less plausibly, for the responses from the victims".[129] She contends that she does not think Müller was "'lying' rather that the story flowered in his mind, growing out of smaller actual moments in the undressing room, and his own terrible inability to intervene". Her questions should disarm us. Is it not a double violation to question the words of a victim of atrocity? Is not this in line with those who try to deny these actual events ever happened, deniers of the *Laogai* ("reform through labour") camps in China, the *Shoah*, or the Armenian genocide? To interrogate the person who was raped on whether it was by three or four men seems to smack of inhuman legality, void of all

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124. Tal, *Literature of Trauma*, 48.

125. Ibid., 49.

126. See Peter Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate: An American Son Uncovers his Armenian Past* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998).

127. Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust*, 25.

128. See Filip Müller, *"Eyewitness to Auschwitz": Ten Years in the Gas Chambers*, trans. Susanne Flatauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999).

129. Ibid., 23.

empathy and compassion.[130]

Without undermining the need to practice discernment because of the subject matter, I would contend that ignoring the literary, historical, or philosophical elements of these works reveals a failure to evaluate an author's words and intentions with proper respect. Not treating Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* as a literary text seems to render a judgement upon it as a work of art, which even if a secondary or tertiary objective of the reason for writing, is still a level of judgement imposed on it. At the same time, as Berel Lang in the "Introduction" to *Writing and the Holocaust*: notes "...it may be objected that to call attention to the *writing* in writing about the Holocaust must have the effect of distancing readers and writers from the subject of the text itself".[131] This objection would certainly be applied to a literary analysis of a testimony that inadequately addresses the horrific suffering and evil expressed within such a text. Lawrence Langer, for example notes that "Writing about Holocaust *literature,* or even written memoirs, as I have done in my previous works, challenges the imagination through the mediation of a *text*, raising issues of style and forms and tone and figurative language that – I now see – can deflect our attention from the 'dreadful familiarity' of the event itself".[132]

Yet when Wiesel includes the character of Moishe the Beadle in his autobiography *Night*, he is aware of his roles as a Cassandra-like foreshadower in predicting what catastrophe will spread, as a foil to the young protagonist's staunch faith, and a dreaded mirror of the older Wiesel's worst fear – to be a witness to the horror and have no one believe you.[133] James E. Young, for example, argues how victims' use of metaphor in their writing enabled them to understand the seemingly unspeakable trauma they had endured. Recognising this also enables how "we might come to these tales precisely to see how the author's metaphoric structures and artful language inevitably created understanding of these events for both the readers and

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130. The same problematic arguments are seen in whether the events in Darfur in 2007, for example, by legal definition is genocide. When people are dying, such legalistic ventures are necessarily secondary to implementing the means of saving them, and yet, because the terms can be manipulated and misused to the detriment of real sufferers in the past, present and future, care in naming, discerning, and evaluating should not be avoided.

131. In *Holocaust Testimony: The Ruins of Memory*, Langer asserts that oral testimony does not provide these distractions. He writes: "Nothing, however distracts us from the immediacy and the intimacy of conducting interviews with former victims (which I have done) or watching them on the screen" (xii). He cites for example a written testimony of Barbara T., who wrote: about the SS man "who greeted her and her mother on the ramp at Auschwitz: 'his pale blue eyes dart from side to side like a metronome,' and once again one has the uneasy feeling of the literary transforming the real in a way that obscures even as it seeks to enlighten" (19).

132. Berel Lang, "Introduction", in *Writing and the Holocaust*, xii.

133. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, 7.

the victims".[134] When Primo Levi, in his *Survival in Auschwitz*, alludes to the odyssey of Ulysses, he is both linking a previous work of literature and urging a comparison between the imaginary odyssey of Odysseus and the Charon that led Odysseus (and later Aeneas and Dante) across the underworld. In short, he is asking if that hell is as terrifying as the Charon of the Nazi party[135] who ordered Levi and the others into the freight train and asked them "courteously, one by one, in German and in pidgin language, if [they had] money or watches to give him?"[136] Comparing it to the *Inferno* of Dante – while only a comparison – is the beginning of a movement towards understanding what had previously been completely unspeakable – unknowable.[137] If an analysis of Dante's *Inferno* sheds new insight into the works of Primo Levi and thus into the experience he sought to convey in his texts, then such literary analysis becomes almost indispensable in the reading of his works.

As seen above, even discussing the genre of these works and trying to seek a satisfactory terminology to include them under a flexible but precise heading, can reveal the pros and cons of ways of reading these testimonies. It reveals what 'truth' or message is sought within them and the different levels of interpretation that a reader should be aware of when grasping the multiple meanings conveyed by a text, meanings unintentionally or mistakenly insinuated by the author, or ones illuminated by a critic or fellow survivor and so divulging new possibilities of connection and analysis.[138] Such accounts can even be a means to help those who might later endure similar ordeals. Irina Ratushinskaya, for example, writes in her gulag memoir: "Thank-you, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, for your priceless counsels!"[139] Any reader may also, of course, irrefutably distort an author's intentions and undermine what, to the writers of testimonials, are their main purpose: to bear witness to a truth of violence or injustice that the world at large has either repressed or remains in doubt or ignorance about.[140] Such agonic battles of

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134. James Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust and the Consequences of Narrative Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 50.

135. Ibid., 21.

136. Ibid., 21.

137. See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

138. For a discussion of a contested phrase in Elie Wiesel's depiction of the deportation scene in *Night*, due to translation problems, insights from other survivors, and perhaps, "repression", see Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Do Facts Matter In Holocaust Memoirs?", in *Obliged by Memory*, 22-42.

139. Irina Ratushinskaya, *Grey is the Color of Hope*, trans. Alyona Kojevnikov (Vintage: New York, 1989), 12.

140. "I had then two reasons to live: one, to work with the resistance movement and help as long as I could stand upon my feet; two, to dream and pray for the day when I could go free and tell the world, 'This is what I saw with my own eyes. It must never be allowed to happen again!'"

meaning within and outside the text are nothing new, and must always be considered whenever 'reading' anything. As Kalí Tal writes:

> The imperative of most critics of literature of trauma is to define their positions as outside readers. No matter how empathetic the critic (if she is not herself a survivor) the trauma of the author becomes, upon translation into text, merely metaphor. . . Crucial then is the ability to consider the author as *survivor*, to bring to bear the tools of sociology, psychology, and psychiatry – an understanding of trauma – to the task of reading the literatures of survivors.[141]

While Tal rightly posits the need for critics to identify their social location and to view the authors of these texts as both writers and survivors, notice that she omits theology and philosophy, whose domain, in part, is to try to raise and answer ultimate questions. An aim of my work is to bring together the voices of the theologian and the survivor of atrocity and present and analyse the challenges they both raise for the other. Without losing sight of the horror and suffering these testimonies are witness to, it is evident that they must be analysed and critiqued to locate those truth claims which bear upon every field related to humanity: science,[142] theology, history, and so on. To fail to do so may not only discredit some of these accounts but may limit our ability to understand and learn from them.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the problems of transmission from experiencing to writing about traumatic events, but argued that such depictions remain valid and are indispensable to test a theodicy's value and viability. Readers of these testimonies confront depictions of evils that not only seem too brutal, dehumanising, random, and meaningless to develop a theodicy but also highlight the scope and magnitude of accounts of suffering, as 'Little Eleanora' is just one of millions of individuals similarly brutalised and murdered by individuals within these various despotic regimes. Such scope, as I argue, poses particularly difficult challenges for a theodicy, problems that are exacerbated in our contemporary context. For Elie Wiesel, the magnitude of the Holocaust is in part why he questions whether

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[Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995), 89].

141. Kalí Tal, *Literature of Trauma*, 131.

142. See the essay by Nancy Harrowitz, "The Grey Zone of Scientific Invention: Primo Levi and the Omissions of Memory", in *Obliged by Memory*, 83-103. Harrowitz analyses Levi's complicated relationship as a scientist to the role science played in the Holocaust.

Holocaust experiences, "like God's true Name…belong to the realm of the ineffable".[143]

Acknowledging this dilemma, I want to argue that these texts, despite their limitations and an outsider's inability fully to comprehend their truths, provide an intrinsic means to critique and judge the relevance and viability of various projects of, or attempts at, theodicy. Or to put it another way, these texts become the canvass or evidence for a judgement and trial of a loving God. As I will argue throughout this work, failure adequately to address and incorporate such testimonies will have dire repercussions on the viability and pastoral value of any theodicy. Most importantly, I also want to examine whether these texts may actually support why a theodic position can be deemed a viable one. In the next chapter, though, I will examine the evidence presented by a select group of survivors with the potential likelihood that their words alone are enough to silence or refute any theodic attempt.

143. Elie Wiesel, "Afterword", in *Obliged by Memory,* 159.

Chapter Two

Testimonies of Mass Atrocity

> See, O Lord, and behold, / To whom You have done this! / Alas, women eat their own fruit, / Their new-born babes![1]

I. Introduction

This chapter will begin with a close reading of three non-Christian testimonies of mass atrocity. Through a sustained analysis of these texts, I want to focus on how these witnesses manage to survive or endure their afflictions, how they portray the way human beings treat other human beings, and the role, if any, that is given to God or religious belief. I include such accounts (which can never fully represent the diverse, and seemingly limitless tales of horrific suffering) to ensure that voices sometimes silenced or not adequately represented in theodicies play a prominent role. Thus, I will periodically come back to these stories throughout this work to see how, and whether, various theodicists respond to the challenges they raise. The road before us is difficult to traverse; the stories are often graphic and the accounts morally-deflating. But as Elie Wiesel once mentioned in class in regards to Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*: "If she had the courage to research and write about such things, we must have the courage to read them".[2] And so we must: it is the least we can do.

II. Outline

In this chapter I will analyse Palden Gyatso's *Fire Under the Sun: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner*, Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School: Tales of Survival and Disappearance*, and Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's *Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land.* I will also look briefly at the martyrdom of Karl Leisner as depicted in Joseph Malham's *By Fire into Light: Four Catholic Martyrs of the Nazi Camps*. Lastly, I will sketch a picture of the life and death of Christ – His testimony, as it were – as a potential bridge between these witnesses to evil and the Christian theodic responses we will encounter in Part Two. First, however, I want to explain my reasons for choosing these specific testimonies.

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1. Lamentations 2:20.

2. I took Elie Wiesel's course "The Literature of Memory: Hope and Despair", Fall 2001, Boston University.

III. Choosing a Text

None of the testimonies I will discuss in this chapter seek to challenge or debunk anyone's belief in God or to defend or refute any theodic or antitheodic system. They want the victims' stories to be remembered and they want a changed world that would never allow such horrors to be inflicted again. Because such testimonies still endeavour to find or challenge the meaning of this world, they are, therefore, relevant to the theodicist.

This field is fertile to say the least. I searched for authors who admit their inability to share theistic beliefs or turn to their non-Christian resources and faith to survive or find meaning. They thus give a glimpse into some of the theological obstacles for any Christian theodicy, while standing on their own as captivating, deserving selections. Palden Gyatso's text is relevant because it is a story of a Tibetan monk who has suffered horrifically but radiates so much goodness and peace and so challenges any exclusivist or unique Christian theodicy. Alicia Partnoy's work is a beautifully complex and penetrating account in which Partnoy wishes she could believe in God but is unable to amidst a torture centre in Argentina. Nomberg-Przytyk's poignant, pithy account raises numerous ethical quandaries that challenge belief in a world supposedly ordered by goodness and beauty. Her ability to craft a story of degradation and murder so succinctly and powerfully is a further claim for the work's merit. In addition, reading about the Shoah is what spurred me to work in the area of theodicy, and for this reason I select one of the most memorable and gripping texts from its vast canon.

IV. Three Testimonies and the Absence of God

A. *Fire Under the Sun:* Palden Gyatso

Palden Gyatso was arrested by the invading Chinese Communist forces during the Cultural Revolution while a young Tibetan monk at the age of twenty-eight and spent the next thirty-one years of his life in prison for seeking the freedom of the Tibetan people and refusing to relinquish his Buddhist values. According to the Dalai Lama, who wrote the "Foreword" to Gyatso's memoir, Gyatso "endured torture, virtual starvation, and endless sessions of thought reform. Nevertheless, he refused to give into his oppressors".[3]

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3. Dali Lama, "Foreword", in Palden Gyatso, *Fire Under the Sun: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner,* trans. Tsering Shakya (London: Harvill Press, 1997). For an account of the Tibetan genocide, see Mary Craig, *Tears of Blood: A Cry for Tibet* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999).

Born under a rainbow, as his grandmother liked to tell him, Gyatso grew up in the small village of Panam in Tibet. It seemed both his destiny and his desire to be a monk, which he soon became at the age of ten, beginning the process of severing his ties to the world. He took his final vow in 1952, but of the twenty or so novices, only he is alive: "Some were to die in prison. Others were beaten to death during the Cultural Revolution".[4] In short, Gyatso's life and studies were soon torn asunder by China's invasion of Tibet and its planned and executed desecration of Tibetan culture and its Buddhist religion. Temples were destroyed, holy books burnt, and monks and nuns abused and murdered.

During one interrogation, Gyatso relates the torture he suffered because he refused to denounce one of his teachers:

> I said once more that Gyen Rigzin Tenpa was not a spy. Liao's voice sharpened. He insisted that Gyen Rigzin Tenpa was a spy.
>
> 'You can say what you'd like,' I say.
>
> Before I could breathe in, Liao's open palm had caught me on the side of the face, knocking me backwards. The two guards who had been standing by the door came forward and grabbed my arms. I saw the interpreter, Gyaltsen, step back. He looked frightened. The guards began to kick me.
>
> 'Do you confess?' asked Liao, 'Do you?'
>
> 'Do whatever you want with me!' I shouted. I was enraged. I'd lost my senses.
>
> The guards held my arms behind my back, tied them with a rope, then threw the end of the rope over a wooden beam. They pulled down on the ropes, hoisting my arms up, wrenching them from their sockets. I screamed. I began to urinate uncontrollably.[5]

After Gyatso passed out and awoke, the interrogation continued. Through it all, he refused to betray his teacher.[6]

In another poignant scene, Gyatso is made to kneel before a group of condemned prisoners as a means to spur him to confess or be threatened with their fate. He stares at the face of one prisoner, whose name he remembers because she had stood "up to the Chinese". The person before him though is that of an "old woman, deep wrinkled and toothless. Her face was swollen and bruised. She could

4. Gyatso, *Fire Under the Sun*, 34.
5. Ibid., 68.
6. Ibid., 69.

hardly breathe. Even today the memory of her makes me shiver. . .We stared at each other. Her eyes were red and misty and something in her face seemed to be asking for my prayers".[7] After an interminable meeting, the prisoners were then shot, fifteen in all that particular day. More would follow in days ahead as they had days previously. "Death", as Gyatso writes, "was our constant companion."[8]

The rest of his thirty-one years of incarceration and torture show his similar resolve in the face of unrelenting horror. The guards put him in "handcuffs and shackled his feet together with a chain"[9] – a punishment that he had to endure for long stretches, six months in one case, unable to eat or do much of anything without the help of fellow prisoners. At the age of sixty, he had to survive a torture session in which the interrogator shoved an electric baton in his mouth and all over his body. It was so bad one of "the guards ran out of the room in disgust".[10] Gyatso lost all of his teeth. Still more stories follow: of failed demonstrations and of witnessing young prisoners – the next generation – tortured and beaten. Throughout these ordeals, it was particularly harrowing to have to endure a system that forced each person to be violent towards his fellow sufferers. During a *thamzing* (struggle session), "If they observe that your participation was not whole-hearted, they would accuse you of lacking revolutionary enthusiasm. You were expected to do harm to your fellow prisoners as if they were your worst enemies".[11]

After finally escaping and reaching the Dalai Llama at Dharamsala, Gyatso accepted the task to interview other arrivals and to record their testimonies. He writes: "I could not believe how many of us had the same story to tell. There was not a single individual without a story of horror and brutality, and I realized that all subjugated people share the common experience of bruised bodies, scattered lives, and broken families".[12]

In his "Poem of Dedication", placed before the beginning of his prose account, Palden asks: "Is there any match for the suffering we endured, the losses we felt, the cries we made, even in the eighteenth layer of Hell?" These and similar questions get to the root of any theodicy and the role and purpose of God. They draw us into the classic questions raised by the notion of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God despite the reality of radical evil in the world. Are such

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7. Ibid., 139.
8. Ibid., 140.
9. Ibid., 69.
10. Ibid., 195.
11. Ibid., 132.
12. Ibid., "Prologue".

questions applicable for Gyatso, though?

Because I need to address Gyatso's religious beliefs to begin to answer such questions, I will offer a few brief remarks below, though I am venturing in basically unfamiliar territory, especially as one has to distinguish among Buddhism's various traditions: Mahāyāna, Theravāda, Tibetan,[13] Zen, and so on. My intention, however, is to sketch how Gyatso's account challenges a Christian theodicy, an issue that deserves its own separate treatment, but is a fundamental one that I must at least touch upon.

First, such an account testifies to the extreme debasement of torture and suffering inflicted upon Gyatso and his fellow Tibetans and seems to undermine and challenge any theodicy that alleges all suffering is deserved, didactic, or morally-refining (note the belief in karma and rebirth in Buddhism would be linked to the first explanation). Such accounts also seem to refute the grandiose claim that there is a purpose to all suffering, for what transcendent purpose can one argue for when a child is forced to murder his parents or a Tibetan nun is raped and brutalised? If such suffering led to someone's conversion, maybe one could try to claim a benefit of some kind, but here was an individual already committed to a life of peace and prayer. The horrific ordeal of Gyatso's trauma and suffering taught him no valuable lesson. If one tries to justify such evils because Palden's life can inspire others, then individual lives become utilitarian tools, mere means to spur otherwise complacent people to act.

Secondly, notice that traditional theodic questions seem to be absent from Gyatso's memoir. This is not because the Chinese never brought the topic of God up in their interrogations, for they did. Other accounts from Tibetans who were tortured relate instances of the Chinese mocking their faith. One monk from Chamdo recalls how the "Chinese would also poke their fingers into the prisoners' eyes and throw dirt into their mouths so that it would choke and suffocate them. And then they would laugh in our faces and say, 'Now, where is your God? If he exists, call him'".[14] This example, however, raises additional questions. What is the most authentic way for a Christian theodicist to interpret how Tibetan victims or survivors viewed the presence of 'God' amidst such evil when the victims may not share the

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13. According to Peter Harvey, "Buddhism was recognised as a state religion in Tibet in 779. . .[It] was a mixture of monastically-based Mahāyāna, represented by Śāntaraksita, and tantric mysticism and ritual, represented by the revered Padmasabhava: a mix which became typical for Tibet" [*An Introduction to Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 145].

14. Quoted from Craig, *Tears*, 71.

same meaning ascribed of God or for whom such theodic questions are simply not relevant? In addition, what type of God were the Chinese referring to above and how would the Tibetan victim interpret such a question? Do different types of theodic questions apply in these accounts? Some scholars, for example, contend Buddhism may not have a recognisable theodicy, in part, because the problems of theodicy for Christians, Jews, and Muslims are dependent upon belief in an all-loving creator God. According to the Buddhist scholar Peter Harvey, in Buddhism the closest being to a creator God, the Brahmā, is "a god of love who thinks he created the world but in fact did not. [Thus] there is no theological problem of evil in Buddhism"[15]. This is not to say Buddhism ignores the problems of suffering, nor that a Christian theodicy would not benefit from such an encounter with Buddhism. The opposite is the case, as one can glean from the life of Gyatso, an embodiment one could say, of the "Buddhist Way" as John D'Arcy May describes it:

> The Buddhist way means practice in the present, not escape into a timeless realm removed from the transitoriness (*anicca*) and unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) of human existence. Buddhist practice, starting with the individual but radiating love and compassion (*metta-karuna*) to all living beings, is meant to make a difference to the world...[16]

Gyatso's life testifies to this struggle and practice. For the Buddha, moreover, recognising the ignorance that causes suffering and becoming aware that all aspects of life are connected with suffering, is a means for liberation. According to the Buddha, the summation of his teaching was: "Both formerly and now, it is only suffering and the stopping of suffering that I describe".[17] How to combat suffering is a key element of the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path.[18] Two famous stories help illustrate this outlook.

A mother, Kisa Gotami, had never seen death before. When her child died, she insisted on going from house to house in search of a cure. When she eventually reaches the Buddha, he tells her to go to a house where neither a son nor daughter has died and to ask for "a pinch of white mustard seed". She, of course, can find no household where such a calamity has not occurred and returns to the Buddha and is

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15. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, 37. See also Martin Southwold, "Buddhism and Evil", in *The Anthropology of Evil,* ed. David Parkin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 128-141.

16. John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian, and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 95.

17. Brian Hallisey, "Buddhism", in *Evil and Suffering*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998), 55-6.

told, "You vainly imagined that you alone had lost a child. But all living things are subject to an unchanging law, and it is this: 'The Prince of Death, like a raging flood, sweeps away all living things into the sea of ruin; still their longings are unfulfilled'".[19] When life is *duhkha* – burdened with "a sense of unsatisfactoriness or imperfection"[20] – one must expect such encounters and truths and know that overcoming them is a means for liberation.

A second story, which was particularly resonant with survivors of the Khmer Rouge[21], but which many Tibetans could relate to, depicts a young woman, Patacara, who "marrie[s] her servant against her parent's wishes". She escapes with him and has two children under arduous circumstances, both times unsuccessfully trying to get home to her parents for the birth. During the birth of her second child outside during a rainstorm, her husband dies from snakebite. Then in trying to reach her parents' house, she encounters a wide riverbank that prevents crossing with both children. She carries the toddler over and then turns back to get the other. But "When she [i]s in midstream, returning to get the newborn, a hawk swoop[s] down and carrie[s] him off, and then when she crie[s] out to frighten the bird, the toddler th[inks] she [i]s summoning him and plunge[s] into the river and drown[s]".[22] Seemingly cursed like the House of Atreus, she soon discards her clothes and goes mad after finding out her parents have been dead. Shunned by nearly everyone, she eventually comes to Gautama Buddha who clothes her and "preache[s] to her about the nature of the world, whereupon she regain[s] her sanity and achieve[s] insight into the nature of suffering".[23]

Certain elements of these stories can resonate with a Christian: the emphasis on aiding the suffering victim first; the means for spiritual catharsis that can come through (some) suffering; or in the case of extreme suffering, the possibility of healing afterwards; and the need to view life honestly and soberly. But the potential for individual redemption through a Redeeming, Creator-God takes on an entirely different meaning for the Christian as opposed to the Buddhist. Regardless, Gyatso lives out his life in the highest standards of Buddhist principles and is a testament to the beauty, value, and dignity of humanity despite unimaginable torture and pain. In

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18. Medagama Vajiragnana, "A Theoretical Explanation of Evil in Theravada Buddhism", in *Evil and The Response of World Religions*, ed. William Cenkner (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1997), 105.
19. Quoted from Hallisey, "Buddhism", 47.
20. Vajiragnana, "A Theoretical Explanation", 101.
21. Hallisey, "Buddhism", 53.
22. Ibid., 53.
23. Ibid., 52.

looking at various theodicies in Part Two, we will see whether many theodicies are missing some key elements within Gyatso's reflections or if any insights from a Christian theodicy could have aided Gyatso.

B. *The Little School:* Alicia Partnoy

In *The Little School*,[24] Alicia Partnoy describes her arrest and kidnapping on January 12, 1977 and her subsequent disappearance and torture by guards ordered to do so by the Argentinean government for her involvement in the Peronist Youth Movement[25] and her advocating of human rights during Argentina's "dirty war". She was twenty-one, married, and had a nine-month-old daughter, Ruth. Her husband was also kidnapped. Partnoy opens her book with an excerpt from the *Final Document of the Military Junta on the War Against Subversion and Terrorism, April, 1983,* promulgated by the Argentinean Government, which denied that she and nearly 30,000 others were kidnapped, tortured, and usually "desaparecido" – disappeared, killed: ". . .There is also talk of 'disappeared persons who are still held under arrest by the Argentine government in unknown places of our country. All of this is nothing but a falsehood stated with political purposes, since there are neither secret detention places in the Republic nor persons in clandestine detention in any penal institution".[26] Such deceitful lies by those in power are all-too common, a double violation of perpetrating and denying the crime.[27]

In this section I will first account for the role of identity and anonymity amidst Partnoy's kidnapping and torture. I will then concentrate on two relevant chapters for my aims: "Benja's First Night", which depicts Partnoy's helplessness in trying to mitigate her friend's brutal torture, followed by "Ruth's Father", her account of her husband's thoughts while he is tortured. Lastly, I will discuss passages in the book

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24. In its structure and composition, *The Little School* blends numerous literary genres and alternates the story's timeframe and narrative voice. Sometimes a chapter is told in the past tense; sometimes the present; sometimes the narrator is Partnoy as a prisoner; sometimes the author is a third person omniscient one, describing Partnoy or other prisoners. In other chapters, the narrative voice is another prisoner's, such as Ruth's husband or Graciela, while he or she is beaten and interrogated. Partnoy's text is an example of hybridity as noted in the previous chapter.

25. Juan Peron was overthrown by a military coup in Argentina in 1955. Partnoy saw Peronism as a "very broad movement under the umbrella of economic independence, political sovereignty, and social justice. . .and thought the movement bore the seeds of change to socialism" [*The Little School: Tales of Survival and Disappearance* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1998), 12].

26. Ibid., 23.

27. The Chinese government referring to their occupation of Tibet as 'liberty' would be another example of institutional or governmental deceit. The document attesting to Gyatso's crimes, for example, states: "The above facts are clear and constitute irrefutable evidence of the crime for which the Defendant was arrested, facts that he does not deny" [*Fire,* Appendix, 234].

where God is mentioned.

After being kidnapped, Partnoy and other prisoners were confined to a site "which the military ironically named the Little School (La Escuelita). . . located behind the headquarters of the 5th Army Corps, fifteen blocks from the You and I Motel (Tú y Yo) on Carrindanga Road, a beltway. The house was near a railroad; one could hear trains… In the Little School there were two rooms where an average of fifteen prisoners remained prone, our hands bound".[28] The prisoners were always kept blindfolded and periodically were forced to endure various tortures, usually at the whim of the guards. Partnoy writes: "The atmosphere of violence was constant. The guards put guns to our heads and mouths and pretended to pull the trigger".[29] Or they did, though the bodies were never found and the government denied any accountability.

The first chapter: "The One-Flower Slippers" opens: "That day, at noon, she was wearing her husband's slippers; it was hot and she had not felt like turning the closet upside down to find her own". As always in these stories, the enemies come unexpectedly, even catching unawares those who were 'prepared'. The narrator paints stark images of the capture:

> she lost the first slipper in the corridor, before reaching the place where Ruth, her little girl, was standing. She lost the second slipper while leaping over the brick wall…Ruth burst into tears at the doorway. While squatting in the bushes, she heard the shots. She looked up and saw soldiers on every roof. She ran to the streets through weeds as tall as she. Suddenly the sun stripped away her clothing; it caught her breath.[30]

She, too, is caught by her attackers, though the chapter ends on that last line with its incongruous symbolism.

The story proceeds with this sense of detachment, maybe a necessary distance to describe her travails – or perhaps, the impossibility of believing the one now writing in relative comfort and peace is the same person being described. After interrogation and torture, she is given a pair of slippers. One has a plastic flower on it, a sight worth peeking through the blindfold despite the punishment inflicted if caught because "that one-flowered slipper amidst the dirt and fear, the screams and the torture, that flower so plastic, so unbelievable, so ridiculous, was like a stage

28. Partnoy, *Little School,* 14.
29. Ibid., 15.
30. Ibid., 25.

prop, almost obscene, absurd, a joke".[31] It stands for everything against which these guards and their means of torture represented: beauty, art, colour. For weeks she covertly holds unto it – "blindly search[ing] for the flower under the bed. . . in-between the guards' shouts and blows". After being transferred to a prison, the guards decide she needs a pair of tennis shoes. As the chapter ends, "The one-flowered slippers remained at the Little School, disappeared".[32] The woman, also disappeared, remains unnamed.

In "Latrine", the first-person narrator surreptitiously whispers to her fellow prisoners about how to beat the cure for constipation by thinking of the shift supervisor. Again the narrator is not named. She describes the process of going to the bathroom. When she asked for paper, she is given sandpaper. She remarks: "I crouched above the latrine and I . . .also spotted my slipper with its plastic daisy on the dirty floor caked with urine and excrement. There was a nice breeze. And if I didn't have my nose facing into the latrine I would have breathed deeply. Birds sang and I heard the sound of a train". This speaker, then, is the same person from the previous chapter. The unnamed narrator then depicts experiences of torture the guards forced on the prisoners as they walked to and from the latrine – hitting her twelve times for refusing to slap another prisoner – "If you don't hit him, I'll hit you".[33] Like Gyatso, this still-anonymous prisoner "doesn't sell [her] friends for five minutes of sunshine. . . not even for all the sunshine of the world".[34]

Soon she is given a name. In the following chapter she is referred to as Skinny while lamenting the capture of her friends and waiting, waiting for their inevitable screams of torture. It was her birthday, as the chapter was called. Finally, in "My Names", through her interrogation session we learn her identity: "'Name?' 'Alicia Partnoy.'" Before being captured, she had numerous aliases. In the Little School, though, she has no name. "Only Vasca calls me by my name. The guards have repeatedly said that numbers will be used to call us, but so far that has just been a threat", she writes, as if she is talking to us while still confined, still being tortured.[35] However, two months into her kidnapping, the guards have taken to call her Death. "Maybe that is why every day, when I wake up, I say to myself that I, Alicia Partnoy, am still alive". Just as the threat of impending anonymity looms, an identity emerges that both the government and the prison guards have tried to disappear and

31. Ibid., 28.
32. Ibid., 28.
33. Ibid., 32.
34. Ibid., 36.
35. Ibid., 42.

deny.

In "Benja's First Night", the guards celebrate the capture of a new prisoner by giving the others a special treat. Alicia had overheard the guards say: "'Hang them upside down.' It must have been the torture well where they dunk prisoners in putrid waters for hours on end…Poor little Benja!"[36] She recalls his childish face and "easy laughter" when he used to pass out leaflets "on the streets of Bahia Blanca" but he is now "helpless, naked, his ribs sticking out". She knows he is hungry and reasons: "By stretching my feet I can touch his frozen hands. I wish I could protect him. . . I have some cheese and a small end of bread saved for tomorrow. . .If I can cut them into little pieces, then put them between my toes, I can pass the bread and cheese to Benja".[37] She manages to do so. A miracle in itself. But the guards are bored and want to "box a little… Benja, the newcomer is the most likely target". With each blow to Benja, Alicia's bed shakes. "My whole body contracts in rage and impotence". Then desperate to delay the torture, she manages to distract the guard in asking for bread. She challenges him to an arm wrestling match, anything to give Benja a few minutes of reprieve. She succeeds. Soon it is 7 AM: "A new day has just began at the Little School".[38]

In "Ruth's Father", the narrator is Partnoy's husband who is trying to remember the nursery song he sung to his daughter as a means to shield him from the torture the guards inflict upon him. The epigraph of the chapter is a translation of: "El Sapito Glo-glo-glo" – Ribbit Ribbit, Little Frog – in which the little frog has disappeared and "nobody knows where he hides / nobody's seen him at home". Like the lost flower, the lost frog is a fitting symbol and synecdoche for Partnoy and her husband. The reader is brought – as it were – into the thoughts of Alicia's husband as he is tortured:

> Daughter, Dear, my tongue hurts and I can't say *rib-it, rib-it*; even if I could you wouldn't hear me. This little poem soothed you when you cried; you went to sleep listening to it…I've repeated it for a whole day but I still can't sleep. *Rib-it, Rib-it he sings on the roof*…I won't see you again…the electric prods on my genitals. . . Trapped like the little frog…*but we hear him all the time.* I told the torturers if they took me to the meeting place I would point to him; then when I saw him, I didn't do what I promised. Afterward, the electric prod again, and the blows, harder. 'Where is he?'

36. Ibid., 46.
37. Ibid., 46.
38. Ibid., 48.

But my child. *rib-it, rib-it*...Where are you, my little girl?[39]

In a reversal of roles, in the further muddying of one's identity, the children's lullaby that had comforted the child is now sought by the parent for the same tranquillity. But while the child has difficulty pronouncing the words because of her age, the parent cannot say the words because of the torture he is enduring. And more tragically, even if he could say the words, she wouldn't hear them, not where he is, amidst the screams and the threat of murder. The interspersion of thoughts of the nursery rhyme, of life before the torture, amidst the torture, is a jarring juxtaposition for the reader. Here numerous lost items are merged into one: the lost frog, Alicia's husband, his voice, the person the interrogators want him to reveal. But they are not all one: Alicia's husband is found in a certain sense and he wishes he could be like the frog, truly lost so these brutes could not continue torturing him. But then he has become an animal of sorts – or so his screams seem to reveal: "Don't make me believe I'm an animal. But that's not my scream; that's an animal's scream. *Rib-bit, rib-bit, little girl on the roof. . .Nobody, nobody*. . .I'm thirsty – Sir. . .sir. . .water please".[40] The chapter ends mercilessly, hopelessly. It haunts the living. I quote it in its entirety: "But when they come for me. . .to kill me next time. . . No, please don't come. . . I'm not an animal. . . don't make me believe I'm an animal. . . but that's not my scream. . . That's an animal's scream. Leave my body in peace. I'm a little frog for my daughter to play with. . . she'll soon be two years old and she'll learn the whole poem...*We all hear him/rib-bit rib-bit when it rains. . . rib-bit rib-bit*".[41]

Notice the repetition of certain phrases just as a little child will often ask you to repeat what was funny. One can also hear the interrogators repeating the same questions: "Where is he? Where is your accomplice?" Sadly, just as the father wishes he could be that little frog for his daughter to play with, it is the guards who 'play' with him, tossing and poking and beating his body like a doll a child no longer wants.

Can someone also ask: Where are you, my God? Alicia doesn't. She simply tells these stories she has lived and seen and forced to withstand without God or any hope of God. "Sometimes, when I'm very scared, I wish I could believe in God, the Christian God, my family's God, any God. The truth is that I would like to believe in a God that protects and rescues me from here; I don't want a God that makes me

39. Ibid., 95.
40. Ibid., 94.
41. Ibid., 95.

into a martyr".[42] Her fellow prisoners, many of them Christian, are awed by her stance. "'If you don't believe in God, how do you find strength to risk being killed by the military?' Néstor asked one day. He, Christian, to the marrow of his bones, found the tools to fight injustice in the Theology of Liberation". But Partnoy cannot believe in such a God because she has only "encountered" him as a pretext, and as she writes, "I instinctively reject pretexts". For a woman tortured and beaten, separated from her husband and daughter, blindfolded all hours of the day, how tempting it must seem to believe in God. Yet, while some Christian adherents have embraced or sought martyrdom[43]; for Partnoy, the idea of martyrdom is a metaphorical blind-fold that augments the suffering caused from the literal one, tied firmly around her face. Like Auschwitz for Primo Levi or Alexander Donat, Partnoy does not experience God while in the Little School, its lessons administered ones of brutality and unmitigated evil. She feels no recourse but to rely on herself and the solidarity of others in order to bring some peace, some light into the depravity of her experiences: "It is time to eat that piece of bread that reminds us that our present is a result of our fight – so that bread, our daily bread that has been taken away from our people will be given back because it is our right, no pleas to God needed, forever and ever. Amen".[44]

C *Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land:* Sara Nomberg-Przytyk

In Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's *Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land,*[45] we have another account of the world and humankind run amok. The Nazis shipped Nomberg-Przytyk to their death camps for being a Jew. But as a communist she looks upon religious believers in Auschwitz with bewilderment and detachment. For Nomberg-Przytyk, as for Partnoy, God does not exist. In this section I will focus on a few memorable scenes from the book that raise issues a theodicist must address.

Like *The Little School,* this work also employs short vignettes not only about

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42. Ibid., 62.

43. St. Thérèse of Lisieux, for example, writes: "Like you, my adorable Jesus, I want to be scourged and crucified. I want to be flayed like St. Bartholomew. Like St. John I want to be flung into boiling oil" [*The Autobiography of St.* Thérèse *of Lisieux* (New York: Image Books, 1989)].

44. Partnoy, *Little School*, 86.

45. Interestingly, though Nomberg-Przytyk's book was ready for publication in 1967, according to the translators, her book editor in Poland wanted her to remove all references to Jews. She refused, citing that "her narrative was not only about Jews but about people in Auschwitz, regardless of nationality, race, religion, or political persuasion [and] it would be very strange indeed to present a narrative of Auschwitz that contained no mention of Jews at all". She clandestinely took the manuscript with her out of Poland when she immigrated to Israel where the work was placed in an archive until the English translators discovered and published it [Roslyn Hirsch, "Translator's Foreword", in *True Tales From a Grotesque Land*, trans. Roslyn

the author's experiences but of other individuals in the camp. While all chapters are composed in the past tense, like Partnoy's book, Nomberg-Przytyk's vivid descriptions of her surroundings and experiences give to the reader a creepy sense of voyeurism as if they, too, are now confined in the camp. The chapters are composed thematically – from the story about the revenge of the dancer (of which there are a few versions in other memoirs) to an analysis of the new vocabulary that took on a life of its own in the camps. Still, there is a sense of linear progression as it opens with her first night in Stutthof, described as if she wasn't in a concentration camp: "I lay on the lowest bunk of a three-decker bed, wrapped in a blanket. I was not cold. I was not hungry. I had drunk enough cold water to quench my thirst. I had gotten rid of the lice. You might say that I felt happy".[46] It ends with Nomberg-Przytyk on a civilian train after her liberation from Auschwitz as she watches the Polish passengers who were going about their lives as they had done everyday. The train conductor surprises her when he asks for her ticket: "Did he want a ticket from me, a visitor from another planet? Did he not realize where I had been?"[47]

As with the examples above, any chapter depicting the insanity and barbarity that was Auschwitz contains enough testimony of suffering to call all of one's religious presuppositions into question. In one story, a doctor from the infirmary where Nomberg-Przytyk also 'worked' at Auschwitz, tells her what happens to babies born in the camps: "It's very simple. We give the baby an injection. After that, the baby dies. The mother is told that the baby was born dead. After dark the baby is thrown on a pile of corpses, and in that manner, we save the mother. I want so much for the babies to be born dead but out of spite they are born healthy". Nomberg-Przytyk assists at one of these 'births' – the mother in agony but unable to utter a sound. When the child is born – healthy – the doctor drowns him in a bucket of cold water and tells the mother the news. Nomberg-Przytyk later tries to warn another mother, Esther, what will happen to her if she goes to the infirmary, but Esther believes her baby will be spared. Once born, the doctors take pity on Esther and she nurses the baby for three days despite arguments from others to let the baby starve.[48] During selection, she holds "the baby high as though she wanted to show them what a beautiful and healthy son she had". They were both selected for the

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Hirsch (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), xii].

46. Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land*, trans. Roslyn Hirsch (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3.

47. Ibid., 158.

48. Ibid., 80.

ovens: "Mengele slowly pushed the pencil into his clenched fist".[49]

One of the prisoners told Nomberg-Przytyk about Mengele's rationalisation for killing both the mother and the baby:

> 'When a Jewish child is born, or when a Jewish woman comes to the camp with a child already, I don't know what to do with the child. I can't set the child free because there are no longer any Jews who live in freedom. I can't let the child stay in the camp because there are no facilities in the camp that would enable the child to develop normally. It would not be humanitarian to send a child to the ovens without permitting the mother to be there to witness the child's death. That is why I send the mother and the child to the gas together.'

Nomberg-Przytyk comments: "imagine that cynical criminal justifying his hideous crimes in the name of humanitarianism, making a mockery of the tenderest of all feelings, a mother's love for her children".[50] Such crimes are also resistant to any fair punishment. She writes:

> The imagination can conceive no penance that would atone for the bestial crimes that the Fascists perpetrated on innocent individuals. What might the Fascists answer if Humanity should ask: 'Why did you throw living Jewish children from Hungry into the flames? Why, on a single October night, did you send all the gypsies to the ovens? Why did you condemn the Polish children from Zamosc to freeze to death?'

These are questions that also put the theodicist on the defensive. They seem to call for revered silence. Yet such questions also call for justice – a justice not truly possible in this life, which is why a theodicist may also speak of hope of healing and redemption in the afterlife. For a Christian, Christ as victim and God provides the link between the need for justice and mercy and the possibility of such healing and redemption. And yet, camp images make formulating such statements an arduous and gruelling task. As we read further: "Women and children got off the train. Often the little girls would be holding dolls in their arms, while the little boys in short pants were jumping and running after a ball".[51] Most would immediately be murdered and gassed.

In the chapter "A Living Torch", Nomberg-Przytyk depicts the screaming of the children as they were burned to death: "The next day the men told us the SS men

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49. Ibid., 71.
50. Ibid., 69.
51. Ibid., 79.

loaded the children into wheelbarrows and dumped them into the fiery ravines. Living children burned like torches. What did these children do to suffer such a fate? Is there any punishment adequate to repay the criminals who perpetrated these crimes?"[52] As noted in the last chapter, for Irving Greenberg, such a scene is a litmus test for all theological language.

It is difficult for a theodicist to refrain from seeking some sign of God's presence, and not to ask: "Where is God?", even in the macabre scene of Mengele making the one-hundred Hungarian rabbis dance and pray after arriving at Auschwitz and the defiance of a Rabbi who sang the Kol Nidrei prayer: "Hear, oh, Israel, God is with us. God is one".[53] Nomberg-Przytyk never bothers to ask the question, for to her it is presumably a meaningless one: all the rabbis were murdered, anyway. If anything, she shows irritation at the two Slovakian Jewish girls, who "despite the reality that surrounded them, continued to believe in the glory of the Chosen People".[54] What is religious heroism to the believer, is a foolish hope for the non-believer: "Here in Auschwitz, in the face of an unavenged murder of the whole Jewish people, in the light of bestiality toward the elderly, women, and children, they continued to believe in God's special affection for the Jews".[55] She admits that it was "difficult" for her "to understand how they could maintain this belief in the face of the facts"[56] which seems to render such faith madness, or at best, non-rational. A theodicy here would seem to be totally irrelevant or insensitive.

In the chapter "The Extermination of the Midgets",[57] Nomberg-Przytyk relates how Dr. Mengele performed gruesome experiments on ten little people from Budapest who at first thought he was an angel. Their fellow prisoners said nothing to dissuade them otherwise. The little people eventually realised the truth after Mengele tortured one couple's three-year-old to death. At the same time, fellow prisoners told the child's father that he was small enough to slip through the wire separating the men from the women. He desperately wanted to reunite with his wife, held prisoner in the women's camp. "Okay, go ahead. You're so small you can slip through the wires", the *blokowy* and *sztubowi*[58] laughed at him. He took them

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52. Ibid., 82.
53. Ibid., 106.
54. Ibid., 39.
55. Ibid., 39.
56. Ibid., 39.
57. "Little People" is the term that will be used throughout this work except when quoted by other sources.
58. The *blokowy* was the female prisoner in charge of the block while the *sztubowi* was the assistant to the *blokowy* whose job was to maintain order among the prisoners (Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz*, 92).

seriously", the *kapo* Bubi told Nomberg-Przytyk, "but you know the guard wasn't one second late. When the midget got close enough to the wires the guard popped him. He never made it to his wife".[59] Bubi told the story while "laughing raucously". Nomberg-Przytyk solemnly remarks, "His fellow prisoners were as much to blame for his misfortune as the SS man who actually put the bullet into him. That was the tragedy of Auschwitz".[60]

V. Battered and Broken by the "Unreal"

Such is a brief glimpse into one world of Auschwitz – and those of other atrocities. This work will incorporate other witness testimonies throughout the remaining chapters, all trying to find the means to connect the world they had escaped from with the world they returned to. It is of course steeped in obstacles. As Nomberg-Przytyk writes: "Nothing was real. It was as if I were looking at a picture from another world".[61] This picture from another world, both real and unreal, she argues, could not be comprehended with a normal mind.[62]

Other survivors have uttered similar statements.[63] Questions, doubt, fears and moments of despair proliferate. As Nomberg-Przytyk writes: "it was dangerous to be too good in Auschwitz. As they say, in Auschwitz the pigs like to feed on good people".[64] Such statements do not rest easily when read in the supposed 'normal' world. These true accounts of the last few minutes of real people who lived and breathed and hoped – only to be tortured, desaparecido, or gassed – seem to belie and resist any explanation or justification.

For someone seeking to defend or develop a theodicy, these accounts raise questions about the essence of human nature and the value of our free-will that has inflicted such horror and evil. They challenge the role of prayer, the meaning of a personal relationship with God, the role of a God who intervenes in history, and the conception of a loving but omnipotent God, to give a few examples.[65] None of these theological terms were explicit in these accounts, but they were all present, almost daring the reader to invoke them.

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59. Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz*, 93.
60. Ibid., 90.
61. Ibid., 15.
62. Ibid., 59.
63. Soon Ok Lee writes: "The place where I was confined was not a place that normal people can imagine" [*Eyes of the Tailless Animals: Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman,* trans. Rev. Bahn-Suk Lee and Jin Young Choi (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1999), 7].
64. Nomberg-Prztyk, *Auschwitz*, 45.
65. See Chapter Ten for further analysis.

To what extent do these interpretations of God and life in these testimonies constrain what is permissible in a theodicy? Theologian Stephen T. Davis, for example, writes: "Although I have no wish ever to say anything to lessen the respect we must have for those who suffered in the Holocaust, their absolute authority is limited to telling us as witnesses what actually occurred. They are not in any more (or less) authoritative a position than…any other thoughtful person to rule on the theological implications of what they experienced".[66] And yet, they are the unfortunately 'privileged' witnesses who have seen and felt what most of us can hardly imagine. These survivors, simply, have seen more. This seeing more is not simply a quantitative asset. It deals with what can be hidden, subsumed, forgotten. These are facts and truths that make living – let alone – believing anything – difficult once these voices are heeded. But then, what about those who have precisely seen such evils, have endured and witnessed such horror and misery, and yet practice their faith to the end enflamed with the love of God on their trembling, dying lips? This, too, is a crucial question that the theodicists of Part Two need to answer.

VI. The Triumph of Faith? Testimonies of Atrocity and the God of Presence

Despite witnesses who proclaim or despair at the absence of God, their voices are not the only ones. Voices of faith can still be heard, though perhaps with less frequency and vehemence. Writing in response to a work like Tzvetan Todorov's *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps*, Lawrence Langer writes:

> It is certainly tempting, probably possible, and, some might argue, even desirable to survey these testimonies ignoring that difference [feelings of life now versus then], collecting triumphant moments exhibiting the resiliency of the human spirit, the resourceful will, the intrepid mind, the resolve to survive Nazi oppression. And such moments do exist, though far more rarely than one might expect, often prompted by an anxious interviewer. But a resourceful, intrepid, and resolute audience will recognize that these moments are inseparable from their opposite – a genuine form of chiaroscuro.[67]

As noted above, theodicists must heed both ends of the journey. The key issue

66. Stephen T. Davis, *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 106.

is whether this approach is mired in ambiguity, whether this "chiaroscuro", or more negatively, clash of voices, conclusively proves that evil has overcome the good, or whether a credible argument can still be made for a viable theodicy. Once again, a reader is confronted with conflicting assertions. If one thinks of the general malaise and despair when reading a thought-provoking but nearly hopeless work like Améry's *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, how different a reaction occurs when reading *By Fire into Light: Four Catholic Martyrs*[68] *of the Nazi Camps* by Joseph Malham.

While Malham's accounts are biographies – and so are one step further removed from a survivor's interpretation of these raw events – they are valuable for depicting the moral and spiritual tenacity and witness of these individuals who testify that, despite the evil and death that engulfed them, their lived faith and presence of a loving God sustained them until the end. As Daniel O'Connell remarks in the foreword to Malham's book, "Cynicism is the middle name of modernity. To say that nothing is sacred anymore is to voice a commonplace. Hero worship is quaint and outmoded… [But] do we need a few heroes along the way? Very definitely!"[69] To admit there is no possibility for human beings to reach such heights of self-sacrifice, love, and kindness, even amidst trying and traumatic circumstances is to deny the very pinnacle – and some would say, essence – of what humankind is capable of.

While our news is often replete with tales of the murdered and suffering, O'Connell, affirms, "Good people must be spotlighted somehow".[70] I am highlighting this work because it details the lives of four Catholic martyrs and because such evidence must also be presented in an argument of theodicy that looks to the victims of persecution and injustice for a theological centring and grounding. O'Connell continues: "Not only do we need the antidote of martyrs' lives in our midst, we need to freely expose our souls to their stories, to immerse ourselves in their experiences of Christ in the very Holocaust itself. For that was the venue of their deepest personal experience of Christ. There it was that they learned of His love for all His children, there that they learned to suffer with Him for the salvation

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67. Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 36.

68. Malham focuses on: Titus Brandsma, O. Carm, Pére Jacques de Jésus, O.C.D., Karl Leisner (Fr. Karl Leisner), and Edith Stein (Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross).

69. Daniel O'Connell, S.J. "Foreword", in *By Fire into Light. Four Catholic Martyrs of the Nazi Camps* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 3.

70. Ibid., 4.

of the human family, and to forgive their persecutors as He did".[71]

These Catholic martyrs were not 'better' than a Gyatso or Partnoy. Their singularity rests in their moral and theological interpretation of their plights. Here Christ's presence pervades the camps. This is a remotely different interpretation from a Partnoy or Nomberg-Przytyk, but one that nevertheless needs to be included and reflected upon. I will limit myself here to one incident in the lives of one of these martyrs. Deacon Karl Leisner had been seeking to become a priest before he was captured and imprisoned by the Nazis. While living a holy and ethical life during his four years at Dachau, he nevertheless continued to pray and hope to be ordained. But the process of ordination, with its formalities and rules involving the right vestments, books, and chrism (how would these be found?), the laying on of hands from a bishop (was there one in a camp?) – and approval from the bishop in Karl's diocese, Munich (how could word get to him?) – had to be followed. And of course hanging over the whole process was the threat of execution if the Nazis discovered the planned ordination of a priest in the camps. Another problem was Karl's worsening health caused from the ravages of the camp and his own practice of seeking to help others even less fortunate than himself.

Despite these considerable obstacles, the miraculous ordination happened because so many people sought to give to this dying deacon a gift that defied everything the Nazis stood for. A Benedictine monk in the camp fashioned the crosier. A Russian communist "designed and executed a beautiful ring, and the silk for the vestments, pilfered by the SS from Jewish merchants in Warsaw". A young lady (her alias was Madi), who had lived at a convent nearby and who had already established herself as a regular at the camp sent by the Mother Superior "to buy seeds from the camp spice plantation", soon became a courier between Barracks 26 and Cardinal Faulhauber in Munich. Once all the materials were gathered, a Jewish prisoner played his violin while the ordination took place to distract the Nazi guards. Such an inspiring, collaborative, multi-faith solidarity is a story that should be repeated as often as possible – as should the act of Partnoy trying to distract the Little School guards from beating up Benja or Gyatso praying for the woman about to be executed. These stories may not drown out the evil that surrounds them – again, maybe the light does not overcome the darkness – but the fact that light is present, and at times potent and bright, must be remembered. In our obligation to

71. Ibid., 4.

remember rightfully[72] the victims, such stories must be told. The life and death of Christ is one such story.

VII. Emphasising Christ as Victim

In the final section of this chapter, I want to offer a brief reflection upon the life of Jesus of Nazareth to examine why presenting Christ as a fellow victim in solidarity with the poor and oppressed is a crucial step for any Christian theodicy. A fundamental issue to bear in mind is how and whether such analysis is relevant to non-Christians, particularly those who have suffered gross injustice.

Like Malham's account above, the gospels, though including the words of Christ, are also interpretations of his life and words, and so there is an additional step in the depiction and mediation of the horrific, raw events. Nevertheless, the accounts of Jesus's life can still serve as his testimony, though one must take into account that unlike Partnoy or Gyatso (who was also aided by a writer), Jesus did not write these gospels.[73]

My reflection is predominantly a means to examine further Gyatso's statement above: "I realized that all subjugated people share the common experience of bruised bodies, scattered lives, and broken families".[74] If Christ's life attests to this solidarity with the suffering because he himself suffered, then the Christian's belief that this victim was God necessarily has a great and profound impact on any Christian theodicy – and perhaps – for theodicy in general. Christ as redeemer will also be a reoccurring theme in later chapters of this work.

We do not know much of Jesus's early life,[75] but two details, though historically debated, offer tantalising insights. First, Jesus's anticipated birth occasions the massacre of the innocents (Mt 2:16-8). Thus, his life is linked from the outset by trauma, suffering, and mass atrocity. Secondly, if Jesus's family had to abscond for Egypt (Mt 2:13), and if he spent his early years there, his status as an alien and refugee in a foreign land and the usual problems and hardships that arise

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72. See Miroslav Wolf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapid: Wm. B. Eerdmaans Publishing Company, 2006), 11-16.

73. One thus has to trust that the traditions behind these stories are faithful to Jesus's original words or actions.

74. Gyatso, *Fire,* Prologue.

75. We also know little of Joseph and Mary's economic status save to interpret they were not affluent – and were possibly poor – if judged by Mary and Joseph's offering of the pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons (instead of a lamb) at Jesus's Presentation in the Temple (Lk 2:24, Lv 12:8) and Luke's version of Jesus's birth in a manger (Lk 2:7 – if they had money, room would have been found). See Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990).

from that situation resonates with many millions of refugees today and can be imaginatively hinted at.

While there were certainly moments of joy and insight in Jesus's life (Mk 5:24-34, Mk 15:40, Mk 10:13; Lk 19), his ministry – not simply its egregious and embarrassing end on the cross – was fraught with failure and pain. He is surrounded by an inner-core of disciples who remain utterly dumbfounded and oblivious to his mission and purpose. A moment of insight – "You are the Messiah" (Mk 8:29) – is immediately followed by "Get Behind me, Satan!" (Mk 8:33) or the disciples' arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest (Mk 9:33). At Gethsemane, his disciples' metaphorical blindness and inability to stay awake (Mk 14:40) had to be a sharp pain and disappointment for Christ.

Who was Jesus's real intimate human connection in Mark's gospel, for example? It is not his mother (Mk 3:31-34) and there is no beloved disciple[76] as there is in John (whether such a figure is John, Mary Magdalene, or some other). He seems isolated and alone, possibly only at peace when he tries to go off and pray – which is often interrupted: "Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived there ahead of them" (Mk 6:34-44, Mk 7:24).

From the murder of John the Baptist (Mk 6:14-29) to Jesus's cognisance of the Roman oppression of his people (Mk 5:1-20), particularly the poor and the outcast, as evinced in his healing and table fellowship with the lepers, the lame, and prostitutes (Mk 2:16), Jesus was not shielded from the misery and suffering of others but seemed to incorporate their ills into him, or at the least, comfort those he could. This last seemingly innocuous statement has to be developed further: the gospels only reveal a few individuals who were healed. While there were other stories not told, he did not save everyone. With his own eyes, he saw desperate children, some perhaps malformed in some way, begging or abandoned; he heard the calls of the leper; he smelled the rank and stench that alienation and poverty could bring (the story of Legion: Mk 5:1-20). He lived in a world where life expectancy was low, in a land of occupation, on the cusp of the destruction of the Temple, of food shortages, and failed revolutions. While Paul could proclaim through Christ, one can say: "Where, O death, is Your Sting?" (1 Cor 15:55), the death of others stung Christ bitterly, as evinced in his weeping over Lazarus (Jn 11:35). The failure to convince the majority in the Bread of Life Discourse – "Do you also wish to go away?" (Jn

76. There is much speculation, of course, as to who the "young man" is (Mk 16:5); See

6:66-7) – may be the real culmination of his failure, a biting sense of loss. While the disciples remain: "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6: 68-9) – comfort and assurance indeed in that magnificent phrase – the subsequent suffering of Jesus continues to reverberate through the ages: his betrayal by one of his own; his abandonment by nearly all his followers save the women (and John); his own inner doubts in Gethsemane; the mocking; the insults; the spitting; the hitting; the slapping; the whipping; the scourging at the pillar; the piercing of the crown of thorns; the humiliation before the crowd; their choosing Barabbas; the carrying of the wooden cross; the heat that bore down on him; more insults and taunts; the falls – one, two, three times; aching of the legs and back and arms; sweat that burned the eyes; blood that trickled; the pounding of nails in the flesh; the crucifixion; the asphyxiation; more taunts and insults; the jeering; the sense – the fear – of abandonment on the cross – all dependent on how one reads those words from Psalm 22: "My God, my God, / Why Have You Abandoned Me…?" In short, one can argue that the Incarnation of God did not end in suffering but incorporated suffering throughout Jesus's earthly existence except for brief respites.

In Part Two, we will see how Christian theodicists argue why Christ is the answer to the problem of evil. Such a claim must be examined in the presence of the burning children, in the face of the holy, but mercilessly-tortured Tibetan monk, to the inspiring agnostic who is beaten for striving to give all of us a more free and hopeful world. We thus await how these Christian theodicists portray Christ and how and whether they connect his suffering to others, particularly, non-Christians.

VIII. Conclusion: Imagining the Other

Regarding the value of literature, Amos Oz writes: "I believe imagining the other is a powerful antidote to fanaticism and hatred. I believe that books that make us imagine the other, may turn us more immune to the ploys of the devil, including the inner devil, the Mephisto of the heart. . . Imagining the other is not only an aesthetic tool. It is, in my view, also a major moral imperative".[77]

These testimonies provide similar benefits. They are dangerous texts. They disturb and challenge and contain truths that can render the entire world fragile, amorphous, meaningless. Their voices are warnings that must be heeded; cacophonous screams that must be endured; voices that can instil doubt, questioning, and disquietude within almost any theological statement or belief. They are the

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Myers, *Binding the Strong Man.*

spectres hovering over every prayer and religious hope. They are the voices that are too often ignored, manipulated, or explained away.

There is a rich field here for theology, ethics, and spirituality in particular, for these texts can be a catalyst for catharsis, a grounding in theological humility, a means of reflection and self-analysis. For my purposes, they are a crucial resource to test, challenge, and hone theodic arguments and statements. And of course, a theodicist does not just imagine the other – but the Other, the God who is said to create, love, and sustain us. It is imagining *par excellence*. Most of these testimonies – maybe all – even the ones that have an optimistic – or even hagiographic spin to them – are mirrors to ourselves, if not our action now then maybe in a potential future or locked away in our own inner, turbulent selves, waiting to erupt like some dormant volcano if the conditions are ripe. They demand honest reflection and a just response.

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The voices of those who have experienced evil and suffering have testified. They have presented the truth of what they have seen. Are there any issues or questions raised here that a theologian is not able – or is ill-advised – to answer? Is there a specific theodic tradition that best reaches an answer? What are the values and the dangers of insisting on a specifically Christian theodicy? These and similar questions will be addressed in Part Two.

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77. Amos Oz, "The Devil's Progress", *Guardian,* September 3, 2005, 4-5, Review.

Part Two

Theodicy Amidst Doubt, Despair, and Destruction

> But the little sticky leaves, and the precious tombs and the blue sky, and the woman you love! How will you live? How will you love them?' Alyosha asked sorrowfully, 'With such a hell in your heart, how can you?'[1]

Introduction to Part Two

In Part Two I will present and analyse a select number of recent theodic and antitheodic attempts chosen from what I will contend are three essential fields for a Christian theodicist to draw from: Catholic Latin American liberation theology, post-Holocaust Jewish theology, and Christian philosophical theodicy. Liberation theology's preferential option for the poor is a means to ensure that theology is centred on the marginalised and voiceless, so that promoting the dignity of every human person, made in the image and likeness of God, is a goal and presupposition. These aims share a great affinity with my turning to victims of mass atrocity to make sure their voices are included in any theodicy.

I turn to Jewish post-Holocaust theology for three reasons: First, while Christians are complicit in a wide-range of historical atrocities, the Holocaust is in many ways a culmination not only of an anti-Semitic bias and cancer within some of Christianity's key theological dogma and practitioners, but of Christianity's pervasive failure historically and doctrinally to embrace and love the other. It goes without saying that Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan, or even his grudging acceptance of the Syrophoenician woman, has largely fallen on Christian deaf ears. For my purposes, honest reflective study of Jewish post-Holocaust thinkers will force a Christian theodicist to examine Christianity's complicity in evil and injustice, thus tempering any possibility for triumphant or self-righteous theodic language. Secondly, while not every aspect or interpretation of Jewish post-Holocaust theology is applicable for a Christian, its explicit focus on the tenability of belief in God amidst the devastating and concrete evils of the Holocaust ensures that difficult questions are not avoided. My turning to testimonies of mass atrocity is to place a Christian theodicist in a similar predicament and milieu, asking what it means to be a Christian theist in light of such mass atrocities. Thirdly, I believe that Christians need to study, listen, and learn from the entire Jewish faith and tradition,

not only to overcome prejudice and bias in order to see that religion more clearly and honestly, but to have a greater understanding of how Christianity's own traditions developed in light of its original Jewish root, the practices or traditions unfortunately lost, and any new, or recovered insights that Christianity has helped promote.[2]

Philosophy of religion, despite some of its deserved criticisms, which I will treat, is an important discipline to test the rational and logical strengths of various theodic beliefs. Note that I have called this section "Christian Philosophical Theodicy" to acknowledge the fusion of theology and philosophy in early and medieval Christian thought and the re-emergence of such a fusion in some contemporary figures. It is also to acknowledge that the line demarcating certain thinkers or disciplines is not often clear. While I focus on three contemporary thinkers whose arguments and aims are quite distinct, they all are working within what I would call the shadow of the Christian tradition, so that, even if their own faiths are very different, Christian thinkers like Irenaeus, Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, Eckhardt, and Ockham loom large.

All the authors of the selected texts are immersed in our contemporary age, and so cognisant of our most pressing contemporary problems. Most importantly, they are writing in the shadow of the Holocaust and other horrific events, and so should have in mind the experiences of a Nomberg-Przytyk or Little Eleanora, as presented in Part One. To repeat: the aim in Part Two (baring a theodicy that I feel to be sufficiently adequate on its own) is for a close critique of texts within these diverse and stimulating fields – crossing boundaries of academic and religious spheres – to identify the most useful features that a Christian theodicy needs to incorporate to be sufficiently viable and pastorally meaningful.

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1. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Signet, 1986), 256.

2. Turning to a work like *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes* which includes essays from Jewish rabbis examining the life and thought of Jesus, I would also contend that many Jewish people would benefit from studying the Gospels and the life of their "long lost" brother [Beatrice Bruteau, ed., (New York: Orbis, 2003)]. A similar argument is made in Michael S Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

SECTION ONE

CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHICAL THEODICY:

IN THE SHADOW OF CHRISTIAN TRADITION

> If He who in Himself can lack nothing chooses to need us, it is because we need to be needed.[1]

INTRODUCTION

This section will focus on three texts grouped under the flexible heading of Christian Philosophical Theodicy. The first text I will analyse will be an antitheodicy, D.Z. Phillips's *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*, a challenging and moving work, with its dual, seemingly paradoxical components. The first part is written by a Wittgensteinian philosopher who highlights the failures of theodicy, while the end of the work echoes a religious mystic's outlook by advocating life as sacrifice and grace.

The second text will be Pope John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris,* called "the first official Roman Catholic document that specifically treats the subject of suffering".[2] Like the text that follows, I include John Paul II here as a contemporary figure who sought to bridge theology and philosophy. As Eduardo J. Echeverria writes: "The Pope not only accepts the concept of Christian philosophy as legitimate, but also boldly urges us to develop what he explicitly calls 'Christian philosophy'".[3] In his encyclical *Salvifici Doloris,* he will seek to argue that the life, suffering, and redemption of Christ gives a salvific character unto suffering and opens the way for individuals to respond to suffering as a means to participate in the saving work and redemption of Christ.

The last text in this section, Marilyn McCord Adams's *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, also seeks to blur "the boundary between theology and philosophy".[4] In particular, she will argue for a God who has the creativity,

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1. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), 44.

2. Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap. *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 243.

3. Eduardo J. Echeverria, "The Gospel of Redemptive Suffering: Reflections on John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris",* in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids: William b. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 113.

4. McCord Adams writes: "...[M]y strategy for dealing with horrendous evils carries the corollary consequences of blurring the boundary between philosophy and theology and consequently between the roles of philosophers of religion, Christian philosophers, and philosophical theologians as well" [*Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 206].

imagination, and power to defeat all potential life-defeating horrors. God, therefore, will convince every individual – especially the worst of the horror-participants – that his or her life was good and valuable on the whole.

CHAPTER THREE

THE (MIS)CONCEPT(ION) OF GOD AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF LOVE: PHILLIPS'S THEISM WITHOUT THEODICY

If I was God, I would spit at Kuhn's prayer.[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

I begin Part Two with an antitheodicy. D.Z. Phillips rejects theodicy for its tendency to justify the unjustifiable.[2] He therefore aims to expose the faulty logic within various theodic arguments and contends (contra theodicists) that this life contains no sufficient order or rationale and that belief in an afterlife context for healing is "unintelligible".[3] Phillips's work will serve as a foil to subsequent theodic attempts in other chapters and will establish the type of arguments a theodicy will need to counter.

While sharing many convictions with Partnoy and Nomberg-Przytyk, Phillips's work will also seem to agree with Greenberg's working principle, and so will contend to be a rational response to the problem of evil that still posits 'meaning' and 'God'. The issue though is what type of God and meaning are conveyed.

II. THE FAILURE OF GOD AS A FELLOW MORAL AGENT

Phillips builds many of his criticisms of theodic arguments by highlighting the logical weaknesses of the premise (shared by some philosophers of religion) that God is a "moral agent who shares a moral community with us".[4] Holding such a premise requires that judgements of actions by human beings and the rationale behind them must be consistent when speaking of, and judging, God. Contra Phillips and McCord Adams, I want to maintain belief in a morally good God without sharing the erroneous presuppositions of many of Phillips's interlocutors who do not distinguish between the still-developing notions of human moral goodness and the perfect moral goodness of God. While God transcends our (flawed) categories of moral goodness, they are still reflections of the perfect moral goodness of God.

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1. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz,* trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 130.

2. D.Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 2004), xi.

3. Ibid., 85. Phillips agrees, therefore, with Rush Rhees's remark: "Theodicists need to remember that 'When Satan said that dominion over this world had been left to him, Jesus did not contradict him'" (82).

4. Ibid., 35.

Moreover, there is scant theological basis to limit God to a "fellow" human being, as if humanity and God are on an equal, ontological plane[5] and God is not transcendent as well as immanent. At the same time, opposing the claim of moral goodness in God (as Adams and Brian Davies do) has major pastoral repercussions for theodicy. While getting mired in the specifics of Phillips's argument here would lead me too far from my aims,[6] I will instead save the argument for the need for a morally good God when we encounter McCord Adams's claims in Chapter Five. In the meantime, the questions and challenges Phillips raises are relevant, particularly his analysis of divine goodness and omnipotence, the issue of redemption and the afterlife, and his support of a "disinterested faith" position which views life as a grace and gift. I will focus on these three areas below.

A. God's Imperfect Goodness

According to Phillips, to maintain God's perfect goodness based on the premise that God is a fellow moral member of our community, one must claim that God "can

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5. As Aquinas also adds, what we say of God falls between what is univocal and equivocal. There is enough similarity to prevent comparisons being utterly opposed (equivocal) but the differences of our nature, or what Marilyn McCord Adams will refer to as the divine size gap between God and creatures, prevents statements referring to God and human beings to be taken in exactly the same sense. See the selection of Aquinas's writing titled: "One Way of Understanding God Talk"; and Brian Davies, "Introduction", in the "The Problem of God Talk", in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 162-4 and 135-40, respectively.

6. In examining the meaning and concept of attributes of God, Phillips wants the word 'omnipotence', for example, to be brought back from the metaphysical to its ordinary use "to ask for its meaning in the normal context of its usage". For him, a word's ordinary use is not in contrast to any technical or scientific meaning denoted by the word, but is dependent upon the context in which the word is used. To illustrate how all language is agreed-upon symbols – a language game in a Wittgensteinian sense, Phillips gives the following example: if we come across the symbols 2 + 2 = 4 ornamenting a wall in the cave of a tribe who have no mathematics, this reveals that "[to] look for the meaning of marks is not to look for any property they possess, but to the contexts, the practices, in which they have a role. Logic is not a set of abstract rules which determines what the role is. Rather the logic of the marks is something that *shows itself in that role*" (ibid., 9). Here one may also recall Wittgenstein's famous example of "slab" in which language "is to initiate action", not to refer or to "express an eternal proposition". See William G. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 92. (Note there is some disagreement as to whether Phillips's contention of a distinctive language-game of religion was ever clearly advocated by Wittgenstein – see Mark Addis, "D.Z. Phillips's Fideism", in *Wittgenstein's Mirror*" [London: Routledge, 2001], 85-98).

Also note the emphasis on practice in the mathematics equation above as Phillips describes it, especially in the marks that reveal themselves in a specific context. He continues: "the form and application of our arithmetic determines what is logical or illogical within it", so that 2+2 = 5 would be met by looks of disapproval and the need for correction (8). In emphasising the context within which such words are uttered, he adds that the phrase "God is dead" will have drastically different meaning based on context, tone, and the person speaking, from the phrase said by Nietzsche or a post-Holocaust theologian or if used as a means of slang. Recall from Chapter One how language gets altered – or adulterated – in sites of brutality, so that an inane phrase like "she is going to see the radishes grow" means "executed", and so on [Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School* (San Francisco: Cleis, Press, 1998), 15].

only act freely with respect to any virtuous activity if God has within him the power to do its opposite".[7] Thus, if God "helps the innocent, he has it in his power not to do so".[8]

Remaining within the conceptual parameters of Phillips's protagonists inevitably results in a God who cannot be considered perfectly good or who cannot "exhibit the natural goodness we find, sometimes, in human beings".[9] In the latter example, Phillips includes the story of the Good Samaritan and claims that to leave the dying man was simply unthinkable to the Good Samaritan, which means he did not have the power within him to do otherwise.[10] Such a pure response to another's suffering could not be ceded to God if God must always have the possibility of refraining from committing a good act for that act to be morally good. If one removes this possibility, then Phillips claims a standard justification that evil is needed for there to be good subsequently fails. Moreover, if one maintains the above parameters for a free act to occur, then saying God allowed the evil with a second thought (i.e., of regret) ascribes evil to God in allowing the act, and if God had no second thought, then God is callous.[11] Otherwise, God is simply unable to prevent such evil and so God is not omnipotent.

For Phillips, these arguments not only challenge the proposition that God is perfect goodness, but also highlight the problem of theodicy: the ends do not justify the means.[12] Even if all evil were somehow redeemed, or if it were true that we had to suffer in this world in order for good to be achieved, we could no longer maintain God's perfect goodness. An example like the Holocaust should convince us from trying to make the case that such evil was necessary, for what would we say of a fellow human who claims to allow such evil for some purported greater good? Moreover, as Phillips and others argue, we would never call a person 'perfect' if that person allowed another in his or her power to suffer needlessly (no sound theodicy claims that the Holocaust was indispensable to God's plan[13]). Using our ethical and

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7. Phillips, *Problem of Evil*, 27.
8. Ibid., 27.
9. Ibid., 32.
10. Ibid., 32-3.
11. Ibid., 41.
12. Ibid., 46.
13. "With fear and trembling" (156) and while "not saying anything more than the rabbis who preached that the Messiah was born on the day when Jerusalem was destroyed" (157), Ignaz Maybaum writes that a kind of progress can be associated with the third *churban* (the Holocaust) as it signified the end of the Middle Ages (for both Jews and Christians). He writes: "The Jewish people, although its Ashkenazi and Sephardic diaspora has become a world diaspora, now has its sole existence within the West; it is committed to dialogue with the free democracies and is free to emancipate itself socially and culturally from all that which existed before the French

moral judgments against a human in a similar situation should not be altered if the principal actor is God. But if God is no longer Perfect Goodness, then God is flawed or becomes a mixture of good and evil. Thus, we have to maintain God's Perfect Goodness if such a God is still to be believed in, but we are still left with the magnitude of evil that challenges a theodicist's use of the term 'omnipotent'. What type of God, then, does Phillips leave us with?

B. The Limitations of Omnipotence I

To avoid the conceptual trouble noted above, Phillips clarifies that we should not say "God's will (understood as 'all power') is the grammar of God's nature, we should say that God's nature (in a sense of 'perfect goodness') is the grammar of God's will". [14] This has some resonance with Aquinas, who writes: "[W]ith God, however, substance and power and understanding and willing and wisdom and justice are all identical. Therefore nothing can be within divine power which is not

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Revolution" ["The Human Imagination" in *Ignaz Maybaum: A Reader*, ed. Nicholas de Lange (New York: Berghan Press, 2001), 156]. Maybaum is clear that such deaths are "monstrous" ("The 'Tragedy' of Auschwitz" in *Ignaz Maybaum,*161), but while remaining within biblical and rabbinic tradition, he writes: "Would it shock you if I were to imitate the prophetic style [of Jeremiah 27:6] and formulate the phrase, 'Hitler, my servant?'" ["The End of the Middle Ages" in *Ignaz Maybaum: A Reader*, 165). He also argues that Jews must see the "victory of God" after Auschwitz on account of this sense of progress. He therefore calls on Jewish survivors to "teach and preach a progressive Judaism which is able to renew the Judaism of our prophets and classical prophets" ["The Last Will and Testament of East European Jewry" in *Ignaz Maybaum: A Reader*, 173]. As importantly, Maybaum writes of the Jewish martyrdom as a sacrifice and crucifixion: "The innocent who died in Auschwitz, not for the sake of their own sins, but because of the sins of others, atone for their evil; they are the sacrifice which is brought to the altar and which God acknowledges favourably" ["The Day of the Lord" in *Ignaz Maybaum: A Reader*, 168]. Much of what Maybaum writes of Jewish-Christian (and Muslim) interfaith dialogue (or "trialogue"), or his essays on Freud, Shylock, or the Shabbat remain relevant and insightful, but his searching for a Divine purpose to the Holocaust remains unconvincing. I agree with Steven Katz's critique: "According to Maybaum, the symbol of the Crucifixion is that of vicarious atonement. But given the circumstances of this vicarious sacrifice, of Auschwitz and Treblinka, of *Einsatzgruppen* and gas chambers, is it not the case that the nature of the atonement is far more criminal and infinitely more depraved than the sins for which it atones?" ["The Crucifixion of the Jews: Ignaz Maybaum's Theology of the Holocaust" in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 595]. Katz also rightly questions whether there has been appreciable progress in light of Rwanda, Cambodia, and other tragedies (598). I would also see no worthwhile correlation between six million Jewish deaths and the so-called end of the Middle Ages. At the same time, I also need to acknowledge that arguments of "progress" are a fundamental critique against Christian claims of Christ as the Messiah. An imperative issue is whether Jewish believers need to render a theological meaning from Auschwitz in order to maintain their conception of biblical and covenantal history or whether Richard Rubenstein (as will be noted in Chapter Nine) is correct to deduce that the existence of Auschwitz means one must render the Holocaust as somehow part of God's plan. Similarly, Maybaum writes: "God wants us to change" ["The Third Churban" in *Ignaz Maybaum: A Reader*, 155]. We will also see responses that will try to avoid this either/or option.

14. Phillips, *Problem of Evil*, 33.

held in the wisdom and justice of his mind and will".[15] Phillips's pithy phrase, however, still maintains distinctions 'within' God that Aquinas would not support (especially in Phillips's conception of omnipotence[16]). While Phillips will also succinctly write: "the only omnipotence God has is the omnipotence of love",[17] his interpretation of the phrase has dire consequences, particularly in claiming this love is powerless to raise people from the dead or heal any wrongs in an afterlife context. More specifically, he is adamant that God could not "provide" these (supposedly) risen bodies "with the right memories".[18]

C. A Guilty God

By emphasising that God cannot be a member of our moral community and still be absolved with inscrutable ways,[19] Phillips shares much affinity with Alicia Partnoy's remarks about the uselessness of martyrdom. In fact, he states that the God we are left with is not fit to plead his case.[20] He remarks that if "intellectually, at best, the divine is indifferent to us, we can afford to be equally indifferent to the divine".[21] Here he seems to move beyond any traditional, personal conception of God to a type of secular humanism.

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15. Thomas Aquinas, "Why Think of God as Omnipotent?", in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 421.

16. Phillips erroneously follows Mackie's argument that those who do not assert that "'omnipotence means God can do anything depart from the traditional meaning of 'omnipotence'" (7). He then claims his protagonists fail to limit their discussion of divine omnipotence to a religious context, thus allowing someone to envision acts that can be described without contradiction according to the traditional concept of God that God could not do, like "riding a bicycle, licking and savouring a Häagen-Dazs ice-cream, having sexual intercourse, learning a language", and so on (12). This would presuppose a being has a head, tongue, and other prerequisite body parts. Such a claim is false, not because as a "*matter of fact*, God does not do these things, but that, given what we mean by God, it *makes no sense* to attribute these activities to God" (13). In fact, according to Phillips, even to seek to "extend the notion of God's power" by saying God could grow a tongue to lick that ice-cream and the proper components of the brain to feel such pleasure – to give God what Phillips calls "hidden powers" that God simply decides not to employ – is a pointless enterprise: "Are not the supposed grammatical extensions of 'God' simply a desperate building in the air?" (13). The issue would seem to be resolved, however, if one turns to Aquinas, who writes: "things involving deficiencies or bodily changes are irrelevant, since ability to do such things is non-ability in God" and so would not be applicable to God being omnipotent. See Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. Timothy McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 249. I will return to the issue of God's omnipotence in the section titled: "The Limitations of Omnipotence II" in Chapter Ten.

17. Phillips, *Problem of Evil*, 272.

18. Ibid., 89. I instead agree with Aquinas's emphasis on the perfect unity within God so that God's being is identical with God's willing, understanding, power, and so on. In this sense, God is not tempted or able to do evil because there is no disunity or potential conflict between God's will and being. See further below.

19. Ibid., 122.

20. Ibid., 126.

D. The God that Remains – a Purifying Atheism

As noted above, Phillips denies the possibility of calling God a moral agent among agents. He also contends we cannot speak of a covenant ("understood in contractual terms")[22] with God because he is not an agent among agents. The covenantal partnership infused in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures is therefore denied. Lastly, he also denies the possibility of God as pure consciousness because "there is nothing for God to be"[23] – God is not embodied. He calls his approach "a purifying atheism".[24]

III. The Remnant of Faith

A. From Purity of Atheism to Living in and Through Grace

If Philips's work concluded with purifying atheism, this would be an atheist manifesto that demolished any attempt to speak about God, to God, for God, or of God. But just as Phillips brings us to an abyss from which there seems to be no return, he begins to reconstruct a spiritual possibility latent within all of us. This possibility renders the opportunity for an authentic life and response to the gift of life given to all. He identifies, but does not limit, his response within a Christian conception of human life, "that avoids the pitfalls of theodicy, but, at the same time, shows the possibility of a response to the contingencies of life that is other than celebration of the terrible, or a rebellious response to a God of caprice. It will involve showing how belief in a God of grace is possible".[25]

B. The Dying of the I

Turning to the writings of Simone Weil, Phillips advocates the dying of the I, as "suffering teaches us we are nothing, to recognize that one is not the center of the universe".[26] The question of course is why should one follow this seemingly

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21. Ibid., 130.
22. Ibid., 148.
23. Ibid., 156.
24. Ibid., 128.
25. Ibid., 141.
26. Ibid., 183. For an alternative reading of Weil, see Emmanuel Levinas, "Simone Weil Against the Bible" in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism* (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), 133-41. Levinas writes: "There is no redemption of the world, only a transformation of the world. Self-redemption is already an action; purely inner repentance is a contradiction in terms. Suffering has no magical effect. The just man who suffers is worthy not because of his suffering, but because of his justice, which defies suffering. Suffering and death are the terms of human passion, but life is not passion. It is an act. It is in history" (141). When reading the similarly provocative writings of Weil, affliction (and not suffering, as she makes clear in her essay "The

Eckhartian sense of a denial of the self when the traditional motives of belief in God seem to have been swept away. For Phillips, however, debunking the flawed motivations and faulty conceptions of God are precisely what needs to be overcome: "In the religious response I am talking of, there is a requirement to love the fact that God has given life with its contingencies to human beings. This love is gratitude for existence".[27] We cannot link evil with God, he continues, because creation "was not an act of power and control. God is seen as over against the world that is non-God, including human life. As such, in the granting of radical freedom to 'the other', the essence of the Godhead is seen as a renunciation of possessiveness, a renunciation of the desire to control".[28]

According to Phillips, in God's exemplum of renunciation in creation and as later manifested at Calvary, we see a further human calling, "in religious terms", to strive for the dying to the 'I', to become "a vehicle of grace" – which is not the utter renunciation of the self (a complete dying would be a perfect love) – but paradoxically, a love of God that exemplifies the fulfilment and essence of what it means to be human. Rooted in disinterested religion, one's relationship with God in this light can be thought of as an eternal covenant because the relationship does not depend on what happens to an individual in this life. The "acceptance of this grace in the soul involves a dying to the self. To see oneself as nothing, and grace as everything, is pure love of God. That is what loving God amounts to".[29] Moreover, "to be able to see life as a grace" is a grace.[30] Here God is linked with love and grace and one participates in this love of God by accepting life for what it is and striving to embody this love for others.

If we go back to Phillips's conception of the world as one of random violence and misery alongside times of goodness and beauty, we can see why Phillips, seemingly embodying the language of a religious mystic, advocates self-denial.

Love of God and Affliction") can sometimes seem raised to a level of meaningfulness and necessity. In Weil's defence, she is clear that such affliction should not be sought, writing: "That is why those who plunge men into affliction before they are prepared to receive it are killers of souls" ["The Love of God and Affliction" in *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1977), 442]. A key question for me is whether the radical detachment Weil (and Phillips) advocates – "We should ask nothing with regard to circumstances unless it be that they may conform to the will of God. We should not ask for earthly bread" ["Concerning the Our Father", 496] – is crucial for a theodic position. Perhaps, one should be careful in giving suffering "magical" powers and instead argue that radical detachment is a travesty against a God who has created this world for the goodness of all (especially humanity) and so calls all of us to enjoy the beauty and joys of life and to protest and strive against forms of injustice and affliction that continue to proliferate.

27. Phillips, *Problem of Evil*, 184.

28. Ibid., 185.

29. Ibid., 187.

Certainly, the gospels are permeated with the language of self-denial and renunciation: "If you want to become my followers, then deny yourselves and take up your cross, and follow me"[31]; and the more striking: "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come follow me".[32] Phillips is simply echoing the more mystical and radical elements within religion. Thus, the philosopher who seemed to gainsay any relation with God – or any means of conceiving of God – now seems to resonate with a Christian mystic. Catherine of Sienna, for example, writes:

> But my servants … seek and love me for love's sake rather than for the consolation and pleasure they find in me … Her beginning and end should be in the love of charity, and in this charity she should accept pleasure and its absence in terms of my will rather than her own. This is the way to avoid delusion and to receive all things in love from me.[33]

This delusion is also what Phillips seeks to prevent. If life is grace, and life is the beauty of the sticky leaves in spring[34] but also the pain and suffering that can invade at any time – then acceptance of such a life given by God can become the means of a relationship with God. Loving God for the sake of God and nothing else is key. We are to die to expectations, for God is love. What still remains unclear is how life was a gift to those like Little Eleanora, who died in the gulag before she was two years of age, and what are the consequences of saying God is "seen as over against" human life?

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30. Ibid., 183.

31. Mk 8:34

32. Mk 10:21. Denying oneself has been co-opted by every medium imaginable, especially by the brilliant speciousness of the market place, which promises all types of joy if one does or does not deny a type of food or other urge. While it is true the cross as a symbol and objective reality in the Roman world of Jesus's time should be viewed as the electric chair today – crosses are ubiquitous and almost self-defeating, as one can spend more money on a cross with diamonds and rubies than feed a destitute African village for a few months. The second quote as told to the rich man truly silences most of us. It has the stuff of dramatic callings as the story of a St. Francis or St. Anthony attests, and puts many first-world concerns in perspective. The worst thing to be done with a quote like this is to succour the conscience by speaking of spiritual riches or say this is not meant for everyone. Like all the contradictions in faith one has to live with, this is an especially important one. A first world Christian (like me) does need repeated prickling that there are plenty of people in the world who do follow such a maxim and it is a disgrace that the rest of us don't even consider doing so. Again, such a command is the ideal – the one of perfection, but why should so many of us live with imperfection, or more cogently, not even attempt to move closer towards perfection; to be happy in our imperfection when such an imperfection has dire consequences for so many others? Such is a thought that humbles me every time I have the courage to remind myself of my own failings.

33. St. Catherine of Sienna, *The Dialogue* in *Catherine of Sienna The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 129-30.

34. See the epigraph from *The Brothers Karamazov* in Part Two.

C. Witness in Extremis

In regards to the first question above, Phillips turns briefly to survivors of the Holocaust (particularly Wiesel) to examine how they viewed faith and God to assess if the faith and concepts he has been writing about can still hold under such horrific situations. This is an admirable attempt to be true to his original aim in the beginning of the work. After analysing Victor Frankl's contention that one could make moral choices even in the camps along with Lawrence Langer's emphasis on choiceless choices, Phillips writes:

> I am not prejudging what answers might have been given to these questions, but to point out that, even in horrendous circumstances, people's reactions varied. In accounting for them what we need is not a new language, different from our 'free' one, but a faithful depiction of the place of the 'unthinkable' in human experience. This can be done if the extremities of evil suffered are not falsified or tidied up, but are allowed to be their horrendous selves.[35]

By juxtaposing Frankl and Langer and refusing to provide the one true path, Phillips is acknowledging that from the vantage point of the sufferer, both conceptions may be equally affirmed. As he writes of this section: "One is conscious of walking on a tightrope. One is in constant danger of falling off".[36] Here, multiple 'truths' exist and there seems to be no ethical, lucid way to disentangle truth from falsity or the moral from the immoral. No ultimate good seems to transcend the concept of morality in the camps. Moreover, there is also no afterlife or hope for redemption for Phillips, and yet, he wants to affirm the possibility that God is love. In fact, he states: "God's only power is the power of love".[37] I still need, however, to analyse what encompasses this love and how it is embodied by God in creating a world where the Holocaust is a reality that can never be justified and its suffering ever redeemed.[38]

D. Where Angels Fear to Tread

Because Phillips opposes arguments that contend the afterlife context can heal or try to justify the occurrence of horrific suffering in this life, he asks: "What can be said from the perspective of eternity, of those who have been crushed by life's

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35. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil*, 206. Note his disagreement with Langer who states victims need a new language, as cited in Chapter One.

36. Ibid., 217.

37. Ibid.,216.

38. Ibid., 217.

circumstances? Whatever is said *must respect the historical particularity of the lives concerned*".[39] He is situating himself in the specific and the concrete by testing the logic of theodicy as it is applied to the distinctive horrendous evils suffered by individuals like the Gyatsos and Little Eleanoras examined in Part One. Rejecting the possibility for any satisfactory redemption or healing, Phillips still however maintains the possibility for meaning. Because of belief in God, he writes, "the significance [of what has happened to the afflicted] is still exalted, raised on high. That is the judgment of eternity on these completed lives".[40] Phillips is claiming, therefore, that a God of love creates life as a gift, though this gift for some may be nothing but horror and suffering. The only potential 'salve' is to know that such a God has renounced the power to control and will listen and 'judge' such lives in eternity. Why, then, does Phillips reject any possibility of an afterlife but still maintain theism?

E. Why Memory Minimises the Beatific Vision

Phillips asserts that with the death of a body comes the final death of a particular self. There is no afterlife. Nevertheless, he wants to reveal further "logical difficulties *within* the general charge of unintelligibility" of afterlife conceptions and so spends considerable time on themes and ideas normally dealt with under eschatology or soteriology.[41] First, Phillips does not believe God can provide the resurrected body with what had been the memories of the earthly one (again based on the sense that this new body is different from the deceased one). He writes: "Memories are not self-authenticating mental images. I can have images of myself walking on a pier at Mumbles or San Clemente, but unless I *did* walk on those piers, those images, logically cannot be memories".[42]

Phillips also contends that when theologians refer to a transformation of the self in heaven, or a development of a deeper self, he does not know what this "deeper being" means but insists "it is not a human being".[43] He writes: "...[W]hat can be said of human lives, from the perspective of eternity, cannot bypass the particularity of those lives....The same is true of the lives of those crushed by life's adversities. Their fate must not be bypassed, since to do so is to betray it".[44] He can, therefore,

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39. Ibid., 270.
40. Ibid., 273.
41. Ibid., 85.
42. Ibid., 89.
43. Ibid., 88.
44. Ibid., 272.

find no logical argument (he cites McCord Adams's position, in particular) to explain how individuals who have been crushed by life will be healed.[45] This is in part because he cannot comprehend what our post-mortem development would entail or how the language of compensation would make any sense in some type of post-mortem existence. In the latter example, he argues that just as we recognise that some losses, like the death of a child cannot be compensated for in this world, the same judgement would apply if we altered the scene to a heavenly one. He writes: "The loss is a human loss, and nothing from an allegedly different realm can compensate for *that*".[46]

Writing about the part of a Holocaust survivor's self that seemed to die in the concentration camps, Lawrence Langer has argued similarly: "The quest for a rebirth of that part of the self is as futile as would be any effort to transform Hanna F's pile of corpses [murdered in the camps] into a sacred community of the dead. This may be a dark view, but there is overwhelming evidence from Holocaust narratives that it is a realistic one, from which we have much to learn".[47] Here Phillips and Langer are clear that seeking meaning, hope, or any grounds for redemption when reflecting on atrocities like the Holocaust is to ignore the evidence. Such 'proof' should obviously impact the possibility for a viable theodicy. And yet, while Langer speaks of "overwhelming evidence", we (and he) still need to grapple further with survivors who testify to opposite 'evidence', what Langer elsewhere has called a "a genuine form of chiaroscuro".[48] Olga Lengyl, for example, writes: "The Nazis succeeded in degrading [the inmates] physically, but they could not debase them morally. Because of these few, I have not entirely lost my faith in mankind",[49] while Soon Ok Lee, who endured malicious torture at the hands of Korean Communist officials, still could claim: "Even now as I look back, I see where God led me and the miracles he did on my behalf".[50] Such positions do not expunge the reality of that pile of naked corpses in the winter snow that Hannah F. witnessed, but in trying to highlight the "overwhelming evidence" that many of us may not want to hear, we cannot then be too quick to dismiss or ignore the

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45. Ibid., 271.

46. Ibid., 86.

47. Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4-5.

48. Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 36.

49. Olga Lengyl, *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995), 229.

50. Soon Ok Lee, *Eyes of the Tailless Animals: Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman*, trans. Rev. Bahn-Suk Lee and Jin Young Choi (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Company,

"evidence" that many of us want to hear: that redemption is possible, that God has not abandoned God's people, that the murder and mutilation inflicted or permitted by many does not thereby sully any possibility to speak of inherent goodness or a purpose and meaning within this life. Such positive possibilities should also impact the question of redemption in an afterlife context.

Phillips, however, also argues that theodicists have failed to articulate how redemption occurs or what development means in a post-mortem context if the relationships we have in this world by which our character and moral life are framed do not carry over into the next life.[51] This issue of post-mortem identities surviving the death of our bodies is clearly the lynchpin of his arguments against afterlife conceptions.

Most importantly, Phillips is right to want to know more about this 'changed' being' in heaven, an issue I will discuss in depth in Chapter Ten when I analyse universal salvation. However, if one acknowledges individual catharses or epiphanies in this world, some of which can be quite radical (think of Ishmael Beah as a normal child, a child soldier, and then a rehabilitated activist and student), it is not illogical to imagine a similar change without sacrificing one's core identity in the afterlife. If our distinctive relationships with some individuals are no longer operable and individual quirks and personalities are all made identical in heaven, then Phillips's reservation may be correct. However, based on acknowledging a God who has created such diversity in this life, it seems unlikely that the afterlife will be a ceaseless drone of homogeneity and monotony. Christians of course also point to the resurrected Christ to overcome many of these issues. The resurrected Christ still bore his wounds. While changed, he could still be recognised in the breaking of the bread.

Moreover, if God created the world and gives us the grace to accept this life as a gift, what, according to Phillips, is God's relationship to the totality of our lives after we no longer exist? In addition, why describe a creator God who grants us this grace to view life with compassion, but is unable to raise us from the dead? Atheism seems to be a more reasonable option than this halfway position.

IV. Assessment: A Listening God

"Nearer than anyone", Philips writes in regard to the lived sufferings of human

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1999), 9.

51. Phillips, *Problem of Evil*, 88.

beings and their cries, "God listens".[52] Phillips says no more of what God does. He writes: "Those who are crushed by life's afflictions are not going to enter a state where all this is to be put to right. That is to seek an outcome rather than the judgment of eternity. In that judgment, their story, which cannot be taken from them, is exalted, raised on high for all eternity, even if it is a story they cannot tell themselves".[53]

While this may be a consolation for the stoical few in this life, with the annihilation of the self one may also ask whether this remembering or listening matters. The God Phillips leaves us with is rendered into a divine memorial for the dead that no one ever gets to visit to learn what was commemorated. This may prove everything was for God, but then one is still left wondering exactly what type of gift life is, especially for victims of atrocities and horrific sufferings in this life, as seen with Benja being tortured and executed in *The Little School*. Based on the events of this world, Phillips can only posit a loving God seemingly helpless to redeem or heal evils, whose power of love creates life and bequeaths the gift to view life as a gift, but little more. Why one must be grateful to such a God is never adequately developed. Nor is it entirely clear what is involved in one's story being "exalted, raised on high" in the judgment of eternity.

Phillips refers to "raising" in terms of Christ's resurrection and Kierkegaard's assertion that "eternity" is a spiritual category – that "raising up" is not referring to a spatial category.[54] But Jesus rose bodily into heaven. While the spatial direction of that raising is metaphorical, the bodily resurrection cannot be limited to a spiritual phenomenon. Likewise, spiritually raising up one's narrative without the individuals who embody those stories is an incomplete (if not empty) gesture of Phillips's God. While some individuals could die peacefully knowing that they served God and lived their life as appreciation for the gift of life, there is little such comfort for the crushed and broken of this world, nor sufficient reason that one can believe in God but not in the possibility for healing and redemption in an afterlife context.

Because Phillips discounts the possibility of a heavenly realm of justice and redemption, though, one can see why he refuses to engage in theodicy. In fact, for Phillips, even the death of Jesus on the cross should not be justified for a certain reason: "An insidious instrumentalism will continue to make its appearance in the suggestion that God allows his Servant and Son to suffer thus *in order to* show us

52. Ibid., 273.
53. Ibid., 273.
54. Ibid., 272.

what love of God is. Once this is allowed, compassion for human life becomes the horror story I have objected to throughout this book".[55] Fighting instrumentalism is valid, but destroying any hope for healing seems asphyxiating. While Phillips's argument against an afterlife certainty has some philosophical and scientific support in some circles, if life ends without any reunion of the body and soul in the presence of God, then based on atrocities in this world, to speak about (let alone worship) God is basically meaningless. If there is no possibility for the lives crushed and wrecked by suffering to be redeemed, then who cares if God listens and remembers?[56] Why believe in God at all?

Phillips's position ultimately supports the worldview of Partnoy and Nomberg-Przytyk. For them, faith may not be madness, but God has no involvement in our lives. There is no relationship. We must produce our own daily bread. However, how does one interpret stories (like Ok Lee's) which claim that God was present among their afflictions and thus provided the 'bread' they needed to survive? Moreover, Phillips leaves open the possibility that God gives us the grace to see life as a gift, but how grace 'works' in the context of Phillips's purifying atheism remains ambiguous. Grace is defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, for example, as "*favor*, the *free* and *undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and to eternal life".[57] While some sources may distinguish types of grace, all definitions point to a relationship with God and God acting outside the contingencies and limitations of this world. If so, then because of Phillips' support of grace, the purifying atheism that he espouses seems to falter and we are back with a personal God who cares about our well being and intervenes and is present in this world; a God who does not simply create this world and then abandons it, but heals and strengthens those created.

To return to a fundamental question: if God created this world as a gift, why cannot God also raise us from the dead and heal and redeem our sufferings? The gift implies kindness and goodness. If life were truly meant as a gift, why would God not seek to heal or correct those cases where the 'gift' was a torture and a bane? Why is God credited with the creation of galaxies and neurons, dinosaurs and wasps but unable to raise human beings from the dead and maintain their unique identities? If human beings are able to help heal others in this life, then it would only seem

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55. Ibid., 273.
56. Ibid., 273.
57. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 538 (1996).

reasonable that if God is the healer, as Pope John Paul II and Marilyn McCord Adams argue in the next two chapters, even the worst sufferers could be healed.[58]

Furthermore, Phillips's aim to show the faulty ground where philosophers of religion inhabit, expose their faults, and forge a path where they can end with a 'faith' intact – or a means of response with this purifying atheism – has numerous spiritual, theological, and philosophical problems. Again, not all philosophical theodicists or theologians begin at his starting point nor are they weighed down by the problems of language as Phillips tries to convince. In addition, his proposed path is too tenuous, linking two strands of thought by such a flimsy thread that it is more realistic to argue one can arrive at some of Phillips's conclusions – on the dying of self or the aim for an ethical life – without Christianity, or through the traditional access of an Augustine or Aquinas and so maintain a personal God who will judge and redeem humanity.

More problematically, *The Problem of God and the Problem of Evil* has been stripped of so many elements of the Christian tradition that if it is Christian, it is a skeletal Christianity. The God depicted by Phillips is not one many would want to worship, and so by implication, no worship means no relationship of God. It is certainly a position that offers little hope to Partnoy's husband or the murdered babies of Auschwitz. Without a teleology or exposition of a soteriological dimension, without the possibility of a deeply personal God, without probing further into the purpose of creation and the meaning of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, one is ultimately left with more questions and gaps when such questions have been 'answered' in Christianity and such gaps have been 'filled' within Christianity's developing, dynamic tradition. Phillips wants to maintain Christ in his arguments, but I am still left wondering why.

There also is a dearth of accentuating the beauty and majesty of life and creation so that self-love is a proper component of this "denial". In what I would call a "healthy" Christian practice of self-denial, one still loves oneself but any renouncing is an expression of the love of God and the love of self. One denies oneself in part based on the belief that one's calling and true expression of self is embodied in service to God and others while also ensuring one's own soul is also nourished to fortify the integrity of such a commitment. This denial of self means often sacrificing one's wants (as opposed to basic needs) and one's tendency to focus inordinately on the self. It is a call to give of one's self to the other – both

58. For my assessment of key soteriological and eschatological features in relation to

stranger and friend. This type of clarification is not sufficiently developed by Phillips.[59]

After numerous readings, I maintain that Phillips's work is useful for the provocative issues he raises within it, his careful deliberations on God-talk, his moral reasons for denying theodicy, and his commitment to turn to the lives and words of those suffering in extremis. His bridging of a parsing philosophical mind linked with a profoundly mystical religious orientation is precisely the type of creativity and fertile theological imagination needed to construct a response to evil. His emphasis on a disinterested faith stance, furthermore, cuts across many mystical religious texts, from the poems of Rumi[60] or Lao-Tzu[61] to works like *The Kabbalah,*[62] *The Bhagavad-Gita,*[63] and *The Dhammapada.*[64] Although believing in heaven, Augustine also emphasises this detachment in *The City of God*: "There is a further reason for the infliction of temporal suffering on the good, as is seen in the case of Job... that he may learn for himself what is the degree of disinterested devotion that he offers to God".[65] I will also analyse Gustavo Gutiérrez's use of the term in Chapter Seven.

God may give us the gift of grace according to Phillips, but for many, life seems more of a curse than a gift if no healing or redemption is possible. One denies oneself to further the good in the world and to establish God's reign on earth with the fervid belief that one is called to the joy and bliss of the beatific vision. Now it can be argued from a Freudian or Marxist standpoint that one should not need such grounding, but Phillips deems his account a religious one. One may meaningfully choose to be a secular humanist like Dr. Rieux in *The Plague* and help others

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victims of mass atrocity, also see Chapter Ten.

59. Phillips, *Problem of Evil*, 183.

60. "Be melting snow. / Wash yourself of yourself....Try and be a sheet of paper with nothing on it. / Be a spot of the ground where nothing is growing, where something might be planted, / A seed, possibly, from the Absolute" [Rumi, "Be Melting Snow", in *The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1998), 13;15].

61. "I do my utmost to obtain emptiness; / I hold firmly to stillness" [*Tao Te Ching*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1963), 20].

62. "Think of yourself as Ayin [nothingness] and forget yourself totally....If you think of yourself as something, then God cannot clothe himself in you, for God is infinite. No vessel can contain God, unless you think of yourself as Ayin" [*The Kabbalah*, trans. Daniel C. Matt (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1998), 71].

63. "But if one performs prescribed action/ because it must be done, / relinquishing attachment and the fruit, his relinquishment is a lucid act" [*The Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam, 1986), 144].

64. "He who has no craving desires, either for this world or for another world, who free from desires is in infinite freedom – him I call a Brahmin" [*The Dhammapada*, trans. Juan Mascaró (London: Penguin, 1973), 410 (91)].

because one feels that is the only worthwhile response.[66] But within the resources of Christianity, there are existential and teleological reasons for choosing one path over another, intertwined with one's creation in goodness in the image and likeness of God that sets forth one's purpose, existence, and end, by and through a God that is Love. The God that Phillips allows to remain is a scant reflection of divinity. Phillips is aware of this.[67] However, such reflection hardly gives a reason to sustain any sense and purpose to one's life. If such a God seems so unattached to my well being while I am alive, it is hardly a comfort to know the story of my life is dependent on this being's ability of recollection. A God who raises up one's broken battered 'story' but not one's broken, battered body and soul expresses a love that seems neither pure nor perfect, but mysteriously limited and characterised more by abandoning us than in creating us. While antitheodicists may be dissatisfied with the traditional concepts of God and so seek to minimise God's power or accentuate a passible God, against such (re)innovations, it is worth considering that such tested traditional beliefs still persist because they are the most plausible and meaningful if one wants to remain a theist. We will see how this argument holds up when I examine McCord Adams support of a passible God in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Four, John Paul II will speak of suffering as redemptive mystery while in Chapter Five, Marilyn McCord Adams will argue why every person's life can be rendered meaningful – even the individual who has endured atrocious suffering or committed outrageous evil. While Phillips proposes a God who listens and remembers, John Paul II and McCord Adams assert a God who will redeem and save. Which is the better and more realistic path in the context of mass atrocity will thus be a key aim of the next few chapters.

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65. Augustine, *City of God,* trans. Henry Bettenson, ed. David Knowles (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), 17. Augustine also writes: "that the spirit of man may be tested" – which would not be pertinent for Phillips.

66. "No, Father. I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture" [Albert Camus, *The Plague,* trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage, 1975), 218].

67. "It is difficult for theodicists to accept the God who emerges from all these deliberations" [Phillips, *The Problem of Evil*, 126].

CHAPTER FOUR

SHARING IN CHRIST'S REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING: JOHN PAUL II'S *SALVIFICI DOLORIS*

> Or like Donathille: She was raped and then sexually mutilated. 'He said, "Do you know what a Tutsi looks like between her legs?"' she recounted. 'Then he took a scissors from his pocket. He cut me between my legs. I bled so much. He said he wanted to take a piece of me and put it where everyone could see'.[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three, D.Z. Phillips denied any afterlife and argued that theodicies try to justify the unjustifiable. He also claimed that the language of redemption makes little sense for a victim of horrific suffering because what has happened cannot be undone. Against Phillips's contentions, John Paul II argues that belief in redemption and healing is possible because of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. In this chapter, I want to begin to address the following key questions:

1) How applicable is this encyclical to individuals like Donathille, the Tutsi survivor of genocide and rape, referred to above; or the witness testimony I examined in Chapter Two? Is all suffering meant to be redemptive as John Paul II seems to advocate?

2) Is the tradition of *privatio boni* (which John Paul II invokes) still useful when analysing mass atrocity?

3) How does John Paul II maintain that Christ's solidarity heals and holds the key to the mystery of suffering?

4) Against Phillips's anti-metaphysical stance, does John Paul II's belief in the afterlife and the possibility for redemptive healing provide a more sustainable framework, language, and hope for the victims of mass atrocity? Does such a focus trivialise or detract from the need to protest suffering in this world?

5) When John Paul II writes that Christ "blots out the dominion of sin", how do we relate this sense of "blotting" out to Irving Greenberg's contention that "We now have to speak of 'moments when Redeemer and vision of redemption are present, interspersed with times when the flames and smoke of the burning children blot out faith – though it flickers again'"?[2] Would John Paul II deny such a blotting

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1. Elizabeth Neuffer, *The Key to My Neighbor's House: Seeking Justice in Bosnia and Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 2001), 264.

2. Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity

out? And if so, what are the repercussions for a viable faith that ignores the need for scepticism and doubt? Lastly, how does John Paul II connect sin and suffering?

II. Textual Analysis of *Salvifici Doloris*

A. Sharing in the Redemption of Suffering

One of John Paul II's main intentions in this encyclical is to accentuate "the power of salvific suffering" through highlighting a gospel of suffering. He writes: "Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely the good of eternal salvation".[3] As I interpret him, evil is not purposive in itself and on no account is sent from God. Despite suffering's link with evil, the reality or memory of such evil could propel one to seek repentance or compel one to combat injustice.

The key term throughout this encyclical is "sharing". As he writes: "Every man has his share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished".[4] This calling is grounded in the Pauline contention that: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church".[5] Such realisation – that one's suffering can have a purpose – ends in "a final discovery, which is accompanied by joy". Here there seems to be no potential "useless suffering" in Levinasian terms.[6] All suffering can become purposive and can be redeemed.[7] Connecting suffering with eternal life because of Christ, John Paul II also argues that without Christ willingly embracing the cross, redemption would not have been complete.[8] He strikingly adds: "Christ *did not* conceal from his listeners *the need for suffering*".[9] Key concerns become how such remarks bear upon atrocity and

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After the Holocaust", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 509.

3. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, Par. 26. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html. Accessed 11 September 2007.

4. Ibid., Par. 15.

5. Ibid., Par. 1.

6. See Levinas's essay "Useless Suffering", in *The Problem of Evil: A Reader*, ed. Mark Larrimore (Malden: Blackwell, 2001), 371-380.

7. As John Paul II writes in *Memory and Identity*: "The evil of the twentieth century. . . was an evil of gigantic proportions, an evil which availed itself of state structures in order to accomplish its wicked work, an evil built up into a system....There is no suffering which [God] cannot transform into a path leading to him" [John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), 189].

8. John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 3.

9. Ibid., Par. 25.

senseless suffering and how John Paul II tries to integrate suffering in relation to the human condition.

B. Suffering and the Human Condition

In highlighting the Pauline quotation above, John Paul II wants to stress that

> ...what we express by the word 'suffering' seems to be particularly *essential to the nature of man*. It is as deep as man himself...Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points which man is in a certain sense 'destined' to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way.[10]

I want to unpack a few of the ideas espoused here to clarify the theodicy being offered. The text carefully notes that suffering seems to be essential as human beings are called "in a mysterious way" to go beyond themselves. However, he does not clarify or distinguish between the differing kinds and levels of suffering, though this 'essential' suffering is a springboard in the text to discuss how humankind can and must reach ever higher for meaning, if the word 'destiny' is taken in its full use and import. That millions of people endure oppression and extreme poverty makes such a reality true and scandalous, but not essential for life or meaning or the expression of one's faith, as Gustavo Gutiérrez and other liberation theologians would correctly argue. How then is suffering essential? And what is man's capacity for transcendence? For D.Z. Phillips, humankind is called to transcend egotism and selfishness. Does John Paul II have something similar in mind, or does he mean the need to transcend the meaning-destroying capacity of suffering or our own sinfulness? To begin to address some of these questions, I want to qualify John Paul II's support of the *privato boni* tradition and how that tradition interprets the nature of the human person as both victim and perpetrator of suffering. To do so, I will turn to Didier Pollefeyt's reinterpretation of *privatio boni* and the inclusion of his additional term "*perversio boni*" to examine the relevance of the theory of *privatio boni* in the context of mass atrocity.

C. A Search for Meaning Within Suffering

1. Evil as Privation

When John Paul II uses the phrase "mystery of suffering", he is not aiming to

10. Ibid., Par. 2.

describe the origin[11] of evil but to account for the good that can arise in response to it. For John Paul II, such redemptive good and the existence of evil are discerned in part through the tradition of *privatio boni*. As he writes: "Man suffers on account of evil, which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good".[12] Especially in light of mass atrocities, the tradition of *privatio boni* is not without its detractors, who stress that evil is not merely an absence, as evinced in the massive destruction and suffering present in this world, or who argue that this tradition "fails to deal adequately with the virulent and aggressive forms evil can take".[13] In applying such a term, one must also acknowledge that the theory of *privatio boni* has a contextualised meaning within the "traditional Western cosmology" of an Augustine or Aquinas, which is not scientifically applicable today. As Peter J. Haas writes: "In this cosmology, the distance between the absolute perfect periphery and the earthly center was the space in which there was a *privatio boni*".[14]

As I interpret the *privatio boni* theory and apply it within my context, it is denying the possibility to judge that a human being is undeniably beyond redemption in this world.[15] Positively, it is stressing that all human beings are fundamentally good because God created them. As Didier Pollefeyt writes, *privatio*

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11. The encyclical does refer to Satan and original sin, though they are not contextualised. For an interesting recent discussion on original sin, see Daryl O. Domning, with Monika K. Hellwig, *Original Selfishness: Original Sin and Evil in the Light of Evolution*. Hellwig writes: "We are not concerned, therefore, with one event that took place somewhere near the beginning of human history which somehow queered the pitch for all that followed in human history. Rather we are concerned with the cumulative effect of choices and actions which were less than worthy of human freedom and community. Each action has consequences that tend in greater or lesser degree to make it more difficult for others afterwards to act justly, truthfully, compassionately, constructively" [(Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 15]. While John Paul tends to view original sin as a specific moment, Hellwig's interpretation seems more credible and spiritually useful.

12. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, Par. 7.

13. Dorothy Lee, "Theodicy and Eschatology in John", in *Theodicy and Eschatology*, eds. Bruce Barber and David Neville (Adelaide, ATF Press, 2005), 44. In *Evil and the God of Love,* John Hick, in evaluating Augustine's use of the doctrine, emphasises the need to distinguish between a metaphysical and an empirical understanding of *privatio boni (52).* While he states that what this doctrine "recommends is nothing less than the whole Christian interpretation of life" (54), he argues: "As an element in human experience, evil is positive and powerful. Empirically, it is not merely the absence of something else but a reality with its own distinctive and often terrifying quality and power" (55). He thus points to a weakness in any argument that empirically says evil is only a privation. While I agree that jettisoning such a tradition would have dire repercussions for Christianity, I am not convinced it is necessary to distinguish between a metaphysical and empirical understanding of evil because the doctrine is not denying the existence of evil acts, as I argue below. See his *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

14. Peter J. Haas, "In Response to Didier Pollefeyt", *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, eds. David Patterson and John Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 235.

15. Aquinas asserts that "evil cannot wholly consume the good. . . [because] the aforesaid aptitude of the soul is not wholly taken away for [the good] belongs to its very nature" [*Summa Theologica*, ed. Anton C. Pagis (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), 268 (Q.XLVIII.3)].

boni "does not deny the reality of evil at all, but only points out that evil is always parasitical. It always depends on a preceding, greater or more fundamental reality which is good".[16] However, because of the gift of free will, some human beings may commit horrifically evil deeds, which can sully and corrupt their character.[17] This corruption contributes to why additional evil may then occur. The suffering (or consequences of these evil acts) as experienced by the victim – and the perpetrator – are real and often, devastating.

Is such a term applicable to the case of perpetrators of mass atrocity? John Paul II does not analyse this issue, but Pollefeyt has offered what a "reinterpretation of *privatio boni*... could mean in wrestling with the evil of the Holocaust".[18] For Pollefeyt, such a reinterpretation entails a recognition that evil is often committed through self-deception or because of a fragmented self (in a process that Robert J. Lifton has called "doubling") by those whom I would describe as otherwise "morally mature or responsible" human beings.[19] As an example of doubling, think of a doctor in the concentration camps who could send people to the crematoria but be a (supposedly) loving husband at home. In the process of self-deception (which Pollefeyt connects with his term "*perversio boni*"[20]), he writes: "When evil is done, the good is not only absent but also manipulated, deceived, and perverted".[21] The theory of *privatio/perversio boni*, therefore, is a means not only to maintain the humanity of the perpetrator and to keep open the possibility for repentance and remorse, but "for the perpetrator to be made morally responsible (and punishable) for his or her evil acts".[22] According to Pollefeyt, to claim an evil act was chosen for its own sake is to make such people, "incomprehensible, even 'unpunishable'".[23]

Of course, context is essential in coming to evaluate and interpret individual

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16. Didier Pollefeyt, "Ethics, Forgiveness and the Unforgivable After Auschwitz", in *Incredible Forgiveness: Christian Ethics Between Fanaticism and Reconciliation*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 144.

17. For a discussion of whether such corruption is ever final, see my analysis of McCord Adams's support for universal salvation in Chapters Five and Ten.

18. Didier Pollefeyt, "*Horror Vacui*: God and Evil in/after Auschwitz", in *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, eds. David Patterson and John Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 220.

19. I use these terms to distinguish what Pollefeyt refers to as "psychopaths whose cognitive, affective, and moral capabilities are damaged severely" ["In Response to Britta Frede-Wenger and Peter J. Haas", *Fire in the Ashes*, 239]. Other exceptions can also be mentioned. As noted in Chapter One, though, the harm inflicted (regardless of intention or moral maturity or capability) is still applicable to challenge any theodic position.

20. Ibid., 239.

21. Pollefeyt, "*Horror Vacui*", 226-7. Notice that his description is similar to John Paul II's above.

22. Didier Pollefeyt, "In Response to Britta Frede-Wenger and Peter J. Haas", 242.

23. Pollefeyt, *Horror Vacui,* 221.

cases. For example, Varnado Simpson, an American perpetrator of the My Lai massacre, who has confessed to murdering twenty-five people, acknowledges:

> But like I say, after I killed the child, my whole mind just went. And once you start, it's very easy to keep on. Once you start. The hardest – the part that's hard is to kill, but once you kill, that becomes easier, to kill the next person and the next one and the next one. Because I had no feelings or no emotions or no nothing. No direction. I just killed. It can happen to anyone.[24]

In this case, the 'decision' or responsibility in committing such outrages has its 'reasons' in a host of explanations and factors – the brutal context of the Vietnam war, the loss of fellow U.S. soldiers, and the indoctrination process that named the Vietnamese as "gooks" or "enemy – that do not minimise Simpson's responsibility, but prevent demonising him as inhuman and so unable to be tried before the law.

"It could happen to anyone", Simpson remarks. Non-perpetrators resist such claims (often, perhaps, with good reason), but Pollefeyt is right in stressing why refusing to deny the humanity of the perpetrator is essential for justice, ethics, and faith after Auschwitz. Note, too, that Simpson said that he acted without feeling or reason. He is still responsible but a lack of thinking or reasoning is what contributed to his crimes. Likewise, he speaks of how it became easier to kill after the first time. For others, it is not the first actual killing that is memorable, but something specific or unique in a subsequent one. Adalbert, a Hutu convicted of genocide, does not remember the precise details of his first killing, but he recalls the exact date in 1994, April 17th, when he shot and killed two children:

> …For me it was strange to see the children drop without a sound. It was almost pleasantly easy. I walked on without bending over to check that they were really dead. I don't even know if they were moved to a more suitable place and covered up. Now, too often, I am seized by the memory of those children, shot straight out, like a joke.[25]

Pio, another Hutu convicted of genocide, admits: "I had killed large chickens but never an animal the stoutness of a man, like a goat or cow. The first person, I finished him off in a rush, not thinking anything of it, even though he was a neighbor, quite close up on my hill. In truth, it only came to me afterward".[26] What

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24. Quoted in Jonathan Glover, *A Moral History of the Twentieth* Century (London: Pimlico, 2001), 62.

25. Adalbert, interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Picador, 2005), 25.

26. Pio, interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 23-4.

does one say, then, of a perpetrator who goes on killing or assisting in the process of killing? Does there not reach a point where such killings contaminate a person's character, de-humanising him, as it were? What Pollefeyt calls this "fundamental reality which is good" is rightly tested by certain accounts of mass atrocity in which victims depict gulag or concentration guards or genocidal perpetrators who have abused and tortured them. In describing the liquidation of the family camp at Auschwitz, Filip Müller writes:

> One could see that most of the SS men had a bad conscience. They hadn't shown any scruples about annihilating Jews…yet they clearly found it unpleasant and distressing to help exterminate people with whom they had been on quite good terms up to now.[27]

Müller is careful to distinguish between the sadistic guard who seems to brutalise and torture for his own pleasure, as seen in his depiction of *Hauptscharführer* (Sergeant Major) Moll, as opposed to the guard who feigned aggressiveness in front of his superiors or was "badly upset by the ghoulish spectacle".[28] Someone like Moll, however, does seem to challenge what Pollefeyt refers to (and critiques) as the paradigm of "diabolicisation", in which the perpetrator is deemed an immoral monster. To some witnesses, there were individuals who (even if inherently good or meant to be good) were undeniably (and presumably, irrevocably) evil, regardless of how they treated their family at home. The child soldier Ishmael Beah writes of the point where such killings became automatic. Full of rage, high on drugs, and manipulated by his surroundings, to his victims, he must have seemed a devil or demon. As noted in the Introduction, however, he is now rehabilitated. As Pollefeyt astutely remarks: "For a good post-Holocaust anthropology, the distinction between evil and evildoer is crucial".[29] Without such a distinction, we commit an injustice against the perpetrator and God by declaring such a being is beyond redemption or justice, or potentially ignoring those who were more responsible.

While I remain sceptical of Pollefeyt's claim that "the theory of *privatio/perversio boni* [can] sustain a 'religion without theodicy (Levinas)'"[30] – as I cannot envision a viable faith or religion that claims the existence of evil 'overcomes' the possibility to defend or justify belief in God despite such evil[31] – I

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27. Filip Müller, *"Eyewitness to Auschwitz": Ten Years in the Gas Chambers*, trans. Susanne Flatauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 151.

28. Ibid., 138.

29. Pollefeyt, "Ethics, Forgiveness, and the Unforgivable", 154.

30. Pollefeyt, "Response to Britta Frede-Wenger and Peter J. Haas", 240.

31. Interestingly, Pollefeyt also writes in his "Response to Britta Frede-Wenger and Peter J. Haas": "In my approach, I do not see of what God should be acquitted, because again, the evil of

would contend that especially when linked with the gift of free will, the theory of *privatio/perversio boni* is crucial for any theodicy to uphold the belief that even the worst of perpetrators were created and meant for good. In theological terms, refusing to acknowledge the possibility for repentance and conversion tries to limit the potential for God's gift of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to work even through the most depraved of perpetrators. As Pollefeyt argues, "[a victim's] fundamental trust may have been hurt so much by evil that – in order to protect himself from the ethical dualism of which he has been a victim – he creates an ethical dualism himself in order to be able to survive".[32] Thus, some victims may view their perpetrators purely as evil, as the loss and pain suffered is too destructive and depersonalising to begin the process of understanding and forgiveness.[33] While most academics who develop theories about forgiveness must acknowledge their

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the Holocaust is not God's problem but humanity's. It is not God who cannot be legitimated in light of such evil; it is humanity that cannot be legitimated in light of such evil" (ibid., 240). This claim is bulwarked by viewing evil away from a strictly metaphysical conception and instead stressing evil as "concrete, brutal physical and psychological violence exercised by human beings against other human beings" (238). Such a conception of evil would also logically entail that "we should not protest against God; it is God who protests to us" (241). Part of the explanation of the first statement [against any need for God's 'acquittal'] may also be attributed to Pollefeyt's assertion that his "approach leaves far behind the traditional concept of an almighty God" (238). As will be evident in this work, I advocate theological protest as a response to horrendous suffering and mass atrocity, believing one may need a venue, as Anson Laytner will note, to express one's "dark thoughts" to God. Although Pollefeyt rightly advocates that "God is not a physical and powerful being serving my own egocentric goals (for example, by saving me in his almightiness)" (240), I remain less likely to shed or radically reinterpret traditional "attributes" of God, in part, because the "shaven" God that results often lacks the prerequisite qualities needed to redeem and heal (See Chapter Ten), or the 'new' conception muddies or radically ruptures the possibility for intimate relationship and worship with God. The advocating of theological protest (kept within certain bounds, as will be clear in Chapter Eight) is also in response to problems of so-called natural evil, for which, traditionally, the *privatio boni* theory was less applicable.

On can argue that destruction from an earthquake or outbreak of the plague is often exacerbated by the selfish and immoral actions of humanity. The theory of *privatio boni* could apply in such cases when assessing those individuals who construct buildings without the required safety measures to withstand earthquakes or who deliberately allow or spread disease to manifest among the poor or a stated 'enemy'. Moreover, issues of structural, or systemic evil, as emphasised by Latin American liberation theologians, can also be deemed compatible with the *privatio boni* tradition. The evil that results from unjust systemic structures is ultimately initiated and sustained by individuals (see my discussion of Jon Sobrino's analysis of a devastating earthquake in El Salvador in Chapter Six). Nevertheless, with knowledge that we live in a world of devastating tsunamis, birth defects, and disease, a theodicist (and again, therefore a theist), is left to acknowledge the chasms, fissures, and caesuras between the God of mercy, love, and justice whom one wants to affirm, and the reality of the horrific and tragic deaths of millions upon millions of human lives who are lost in spite of – and not because of – humanity's hopes and aims.

32. Pollefeyt, "Ethics, Forgiveness, and the Unforgivable", 158.

33. For a victim of apartheid's encounter and subsequent meetings with the infamous Eugene de Kock, commanding officer of state-sanctioned death squads under apartheid, see Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003). For a critical assessment of Gobodo-Madikizela's work, see Lawrence Langer, "Memory and Justice After the Holocaust and Apartheid", in *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006),

'blessed' position as non-victims, Pollefeyt adds: "By not being able to forgive the perpetrator the victim gives evil the final word and he allows the memory of it to dominate his whole life in a negative way".[34]

Pollefeyt's reinterpretation of *privatio boni* helps to minimise many of the standard criticisms against the theory while providing reasons to validate the pervasive goodness of the world and giving grounds to hope that perpetrators of evil can be tried, and possibly, redeemed.[35] This hope (and testament) also supports the belief that suffering calls upon all of us to give freely to the other in need and so is a fundamental calling "*to unleash*" the love within us, as John Paul II writes.[36] All are thus called to transcend our selfishness (or sinfulness) and reach out both to victims and perpetrators, even if this entails further suffering. If this is the case, does John Paul II, therefore, allow for sufficient theological doubt and questioning?

2. "Blaspheme God and Die"[37]

While I will comprehensively treat the issue of theological protest in the chapters on post-Holocaust Jewish theology, John Paul II is well-aware that when evil or suffering strikes, even an optimistic or hopeful believer may turn to God for answers. Acknowledging the sometimes desperate need to find the reason for some suffering, John Paul II writes: "Man can put this question to God with all the emotion of his heart and with his mind full of dismay and anxiety; and God expects the question and listens to it".[38] This is probably the most pastorally relevant section of the encyclical. The notion that it is morally permissible to raise these questions with God, and more importantly, that God knows human beings at their deepest core and expects it, could be a comforting hope and solace for many.

Putting questions to God (and questioning God) has a rich tradition in the Bible. Like other commentators, John Paul II turns to the Book of Job in which the

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82-96.

34. Pollefeyt, "Ethics, Forgiveness, and the Unforgivable", 158. For his argument that "the basic structure of ethics after Auschwitz should be openness to the vulnerability of the other," see his "The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust", in *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives: Critiques, and Responses*, ed. John Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 239. For a further discussion of the requirement of forgiveness within theodic language, see Chapter 11.

35. The conversion of the Roman centurion may best illustrate this catharsis in Scripture, though one may also include Zacchaeus (as a chief tax collector), the apostle Matthew (tax collector), and Saul (a persecutor of Christians). The Hebrew Bible, particularly the Book of Judges, is one long story of a people faithful to God, then unfaithful, and then faithful again. In our contemporary times, the story of child soldier Ishmael Beah, as detailed in The Introduction, also testifies to this phenomenon.

36. John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 29.

37. Job 2:9

38. John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 10.

question of innocent suffering is at the forefront. Although he notes that Job "does not yet give the solution to the problem",[39] he agrees with the book's stance against the erroneous assertion that all punishments were deserved based on a "previous fault".[40] He also adds that the "Old Testament" often refers to suffering having an "educational value" where "The personal dimension of suffering is affirmed. According to this dimension.... Suffering must serve for conversion, that is for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject, who can recognise this divine mercy in his call for repentance".[41] A clear insight emerges from John Paul II's reading of the Hebrew Scriptures: suffering is not often deserved but it may serve to teach the victim a lesson or truth previously not known. However, as I affirmed while analysing Palden Gyatso's testimony, there are plenty of truths one does not need to experience to know. It is "useless knowledge" as Charlotte Delbo writes.[42] Because John Paul II does not clarify this need for conversion, it is unclear whether he also has in mind an abused child or Donathille, when conversion could connote sinfulness or inadvertently provide the impetus to blame the victims.

As Eduardo Echeverria reminds us, however, John Paul II is providing multiple explanations for suffering – not stating that one reason is to be applied to every situation: "Significantly, John Paul II does not estimate the value of all suffering in terms of teleology".[43]

3. The Anti-world of Suffering

While there is great hope inherent in *privatio boni* and comfort in God expecting questions from us, the extent of human suffering and evil can seem insurmountable.[44] And yet, despite the isolation of many victims, John Paul II

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39. Ibid., Par. 12.
40. Ibid., Par. 11.
41. Ibid., Par. 12.
42. See the second book of her trilogy in *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 115-231.
43. Eduardo J. Echeverria, "The Gospel of Redemptive Suffering: Reflections on John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris*", in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids: William b. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 119.
44. In *Memory and Identity*, John Paul II asks: "Could the mystery of Redemption be the response to that historical evil which, in different forms, continually recurs in human affairs? Is it also the response of the evil of our own day? It can seem that the evil of the concentration camps, of gas chambers, of police cruelty, of total war and of oppressive regimes – evil which, among other things, systematically contradicts the message of the Cross – it can seem, I say, that such evil is more powerful than any good. Yet if we look more closely at the history of those peoples and nations who have endured the trial of totalitarian systems and persecutions on account of their faith, we discover that is precisely where the victorious presence of Christ's cross is most clearly revealed. . . To those who are subjected to systematic evil, there remains only Christ and his cross as a source of spiritual self-defence, as a promise of victory" (ibid., 21-2).

contends that they share hope in solidarity because of their mutual suffering, a hope embodied in the witnesses who strive to end such suffering everywhere. As Soon Ok Lee testifies after escaping from the North Korean gulags: "I wanted to gather the lamentations of thousands and millions of prisoners who live under conditions humans cannot bear…I wanted to proclaim on their behalf, 'We're human beings too. We have a right to speak!'"[45]

While not referring to any concrete cases, John Paul II writes: "In itself human suffering constitutes as it were a specific 'world' which exists together with man, which appears in him and passes, and sometimes does not pass, but which consolidates itself and becomes deeply rooted in him".[46] As Holocaust survivor Philip K remarks: "I often say to people who pretend or seem to be marvelling at the fact that I seem so normal, so unperturbed, and so capable of functioning – they seem to think the Holocaust passed over and it's done with: It's my *skin. This is not a coat. You can't take it off. And it's there, and it will be there until I die. . .*"[47]Also recall Nomberg-Przytyk's disjointed reaction after being liberated from the camps and taking a civilian train – as opposed to the cattle cars that rumbled to the death camps while carrying many corpses, interspersed with the still living. When the conductor asked for a ticket, she thought: "Did he want a ticket from me, a visitor from another planet? Did he not realise where I had been?"[48] The worlds seemed utterly separate, though as Lawrence Langer reminds us: "Auschwitz is often described (with a certain melodramatic flair) as an 'anti-world', a separate planet, though in fact the camp was in Poland in Europe on planet earth, run by men and women like the rest of us. . .With the exception of a few handful of sadists, they did their work of destruction routinely and with detached satisfaction".[49] Such a world exists within the 'greater' world, but is especially concentrated for fellow victims on the side of justice and morality.[50] It possesses its own solidarity. For John Paul II,

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45. Soon Ok Lee, *Eyes of the Tailless Animals*: *Prison Memoirs of a North Korean Woman*, trans. Rev. Bahn-Suk Lee and Jin Young Choi (Bartlesville: Living Sacrifice Book Company, 1999), 9.

46. John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 8.

47. Lawrence Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 205.

48. Sara Nomberg-Przytyk, *Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land,* trans. Roslyn Hirsch (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 158

49. Langer, *Admitting*, 6.

50. Whether a survivor of genocide in Rwanda or of torture and detention in Iraq, Zimbabwe, or China – one often encounters a common language and experience that transcends country, ethnicity, or 'cause'. In *Human Cargo, A Journey Among Refugees* by Caroline Moorehead, we encounter numerous refugees who survived torture and extreme hardship or had relatives murdered and tortured and so seek to help others who had to endure similar hells. Aida Alayarian, an Armenian survivor of Iran's notorious Evin prison, and Josephine Klein, a Jewish

Jesus of Nazareth was also a victim who had to endure such a world as a fellow sufferer, but who as God Incarnate embodies the means to sacralise what otherwise seems degrading and painful.

D. The Meaning Found

1. Love Amidst Suffering

Returning to the encyclical quote at the beginning of the previous section, note that John Paul II is also arguing his main point, that through the suffering of Christ, God is united with all who suffer, thus redeeming all suffering and enabling everyone to share in this redemption through imitating Christ. It is through suffering that human existence becomes "particularly concentrated" with the potential to work for good. Because God suffered in the person of Jesus of Nazareth who also overcame the power of sin and death through his resurrection, Jesus, as a fellow human sufferer, is in solidarity with all those who endure affliction and yet provides a means to hope that such suffering can be healed because of the promise of eternal life. John Paul II writes: "As a result of Christ's salvific work, man exists on earth *with the hope* of eternal life and holiness".[51]

For John Paul II, only Christ provides a meaning for all suffering and a way to access God's love. He continues:

> We must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.[52]

John Paul II identifies the meaning of suffering in the Cross of Christ by linking Christ's crucifixion as a sign of God's universal love. He wants to emphasise that "the only-begotten Son was given to humanity primarily to protect man against this definitive evil and against definitive suffering", so it can be said that Jesus conquers "sin and death by his obedience unto death, and he overcame death by his Resurrection".[53] According to John Paul II, death is overcome because the risen

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survivor of the Holocaust who was able to flee with her parents to England though losing most of her extended family to the camps, started a "Refugee Therapy Center with therapists able to work in seventeen different languages" [(New York: Picador, 2006), 277].

51. John Paul II, *Salvifici,* Par. 15.
52. Ibid., Par. 13.
53. Ibid., Par. 14.

Christ testifies that death will not have the final word. Contra Phillips, there will be resurrection.

However, while some types of suffering can participate and find meaning in this Gospel of suffering that John Paul highlights, some suffering can also be destructive and degrading. There are conditions that could very likely turn any of us into one of the *Muselmänner*, as Primo Levi and others witnessed in the camps. Another question, then, is how this truth will redeem what had been lost.

2. Blotting Out "the Dominion of Sin"

While the magnitude of affliction still needs explanation, some of that suffering, according to John Paul II, must be endured for the greater good. He therefore quotes Jesus's chastisement of Peter, who rebuked Christ for predicting what was to happen to the Son of Man. As John Paul II remarks: "The Scriptures had to be fulfilled".[54] John Paul II states that Christ's death was needed to redeem humanity from eternal punishment on account of original sin and to "blot out…the dominion of sin".[55] While this interpretation may give hope to many of us, it does not adequately address the suffering of an individual like Donathille or a child abused. To imply that the little child is also tainted with original sin – and so Christ's death is also a cause of joy for that child – seems neither pastorally nor spiritually effective. Thus, blotting out sin may not be the most important 'accomplishment' when encountering a victim of horrendous evil and suffering, though of course, victims are not immune from the need for forgiveness as their 'victimhood' is not (or should not be) their only identity-marker. Another issue (which I will treat further below) is how the necessity of Christ's suffering compares with other testimonial accounts from Chapter Two and whether such a focus minimises Christ's solidarity with them. I want to focus now, however, on the issue of the meaning of suffering and who or what adjudicates what seems to depend upon a subjective and amorphous interpretive framework. John Paul II says it is the love of Christ on the cross that is the answer, but how exactly does this love reflect upon and interpret another's suffering?

3. The Subjective Meaning of Suffering

While some suffering certainly can be deemed meaningful, disentangling mere subjectivity within such a claim remains problematic. For the paramilitary forces in

54. Ibid., Par. 17.

El Salvador, Oscar Romero's murder was an accomplished goal, not a spiritually meaningful one. Moreover, compare Karl Leisner's martyrdom and the torture of Alicia Partnoy, an atheist. While one can argue that the latter was also doing the work of Christ by seeking justice for all, it is easier to apply John Paul II's interpretation of suffering to a victim like Leisner who identified his suffering with Christ's. Love was also a motivation for Partnoy, but for her, the suffering she endured was not given meaning because of Christ, it was a horror she had to survive. Examples like Leisner, therefore, better support why John Paul II can quote St. Paul and others who state that present pains are "not worth comparing with the glory that is revealed in us" – without the need for clarification or nuance. Clarification, however, would have been needed if Partnoy or Donathille were considered.

Because my aim is to keep such victims in mind, consider first, that trying to quantify time, implying that in the context of eternal life, this life is a mere blip, can be morally dangerous. Perhaps in the context of the beatific vision, as McCord Adams will note in the next chapter, even the worst of the torture many have undergone will lose their destructive and dominant force. But thirty years or hours of brutal torture and starvation will seem like an eternity in the context of our finite life on earth – and for all intents and purposes – are. As Charlotte Delbo writes: "O you who know / Did you know that a day is longer than a year / a minute longer than a lifetime".[56] Secondly, such suffering also leaves a traumatic residue that persists long after the physical torture has ceased. It shatters many people's hope and trust in this world as Jean Améry has testified and sadly succumbed to: "Twenty-two years later I am still dangling over the ground by dislocated arms, panting, and accusing myself".[57] Existentially, some pain may be so debilitating and destructive that even articulating the language of the beatific vision demands care and humility. Olga Lengyl, still tortured by how she inadvertently sent her parents and young sons to immediate death during a selection at Auschwitz, opens her testimony *Five Chimneys*:

> *Mea culpa*, my fault, *mea maxima culpa!* I cannot acquit myself of the charge that I am, in part, responsible for the destruction of my own parents and two young sons. The world understands that I could not have known,

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55. Ibid., Par. 15.

56. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After,* 11.

57. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities,*
trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 36.

> but in my heart the terrible feeling persists that I could have, I might have, saved them.[58]

It remains unclear how the memory of those pains will be precisely overcome or how connecting them with Christ's love on the cross provides meaning for them. Moreover, as Phillips has argued, how will such pain be surmounted simply be altering the context to a heavenly one? While John Paul II does not treat these issues in depth here, he does stress that Christ's solidarity with the poor and oppressed through his own tribulations does give unto suffering a salvific character: it is through Christ's suffering and crucifixion that all were saved according to Christian dogma, and Jesus as God Incarnate sheds light as an example of a life lived according to the love of God and love of neighbour. John Paul II writes "Christ has taught man *to do good by his suffering* and *to do good to those who suffer*. In this double aspect he has completely revealed the meaning of suffering".[59] If one interprets Jesus's life and mission in light of Christian tradition, one can participate in that same mission by following the life and example of Christ, either by healing those who suffer, seeking to spread the reign of God on earth despite any suffering that may accrue, or by serving as inspiration for others in responding with faith and hope to one's own suffering. As John Paul II writes:

> Every man has his share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished… In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.[60]

Despite tribulations and suffering, through solidarity with Christ, all are meant to be inspired, comforted, and healed.[61] Thus, "suffering is given a new meaning: to share in the suffering of Christ is, at the same time, to suffer for the kingdom of God. In the eyes of a just God, before his judgment, those who share in the suffering of Christ become worthy of this Kingdom".[62] Recall that Alicia Partnoy's suffering was ultimately caused by her striving for social justice in Argentina. Such an aim resonates with some interpretations of the life and mission of Jesus of Nazareth, and so one can say she shared in the redemption of the world. However, social justice is

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58. Olga Lengyl, *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995), 11.
59. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris,* Par. 30.
60. Ibid., Par. 15.
61. Ibid., Par. 20.
62. Ibid., Par. 21.

by no means the exclusive domain of Christians. Moreover, what about senseless suffering or a woman abused by her partner? How can such "useless suffering" be said to participate in the Kingdom of God without promoting passivity in the face of evil or implying that such evil has meaning in itself? In addition, how can we apply John Paul II's claim that suffering can be a means of rejoicing because it is linked to a greater, meaningful end?

4. Rejoicing in Suffering

According to John Paul II, "the final stage of the spiritual journey in relation to suffering [is] embodied in the statement: 'Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the Church'".[63] In this Pauline quote, there is no essential lack in Christ's Redemption which implies the Redemption is not complete. For John Paul II, "*It only means* that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, *remains always open to all love* expressed in *human suffering*....[It is] constantly being 'accomplished'".[64] In addition, the Church plays a fundamental role in helping to aid and support this accomplishing, for: "It is precisely the Church, which ceaselessly draws on the infinite resources of the Redemption, introducing it into the life of humanity, which is the dimension in which the redemptive suffering of Christ can be constantly completed by the suffering of man".[65] As I interpret these somewhat mystifying statements, John Paul II wants to leave room for human striving and participation in the saving work of Christ without implying that human actions (without the grace of God) are equally able to participate in the redemption of suffering or are finishing what Christ was unable to. The Church, especially understood as the mystical body of Christ, plays an integral role in facilitating humanity's potential to share in this redemption and calling. Ultimately, 'credit' belongs to Christ, but the human person is still an active and 'free' creature who can strive to follow and 'accomplish' the work of Christ.

While John Paul II is painfully aware of the destruction that some suffering can inflict, he also wants to provide a message of hope for how individuals can respond to suffering. In *Memory and Identity*, he writes:

> All human suffering, all pain, all infirmity contains within itself a promise of salvation, a promise of joy: 'I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for

63. Ibid., Par. 24.
64. Ibid., Par. 24.
65. Ibid., Par. 6.

> your sake,' writes Saint Paul (Col 1:24). This applies to all forms of suffering, called forth by evil…all this evil is present in our world partly so as to awaken our love, our self-gift in generous and disinterested service to those visited by suffering.[66]

One rejoices because of this hope and promise and not because of the actual suffering. Humanity is called to give of themselves in self-love to others by following the example and witness of Christ. Thus, while also returning us to his description of suffering as essential, I still need to address what he means by 'accomplishing' in the context of suffering.

As noted above, some suffering is simply loss, annihilation, human degradation – it is "excremental assault" – to borrow Terrence de Pres's term. I would maintain further that all such loss of life remains a tragedy and a failure even if a greater good arises on account of it. Rejoicing for a reward outside this life saves the problem and the solution for another time; it is to look elsewhere to condition meaning here. Agreeing with D.Z. Phillips, I would caution that if a theodicy is too quick to subsume the evil experienced under the hope for some future, other-worldly, redemptive good, it may unintentionally trivialise or "bypass" the concrete and particular suffering of an individual as something automatically healed, forgotten, or justified because of Christ's resurrection. It thus will fail to deal adequately with the trauma and affliction experienced in this world. At the same time, Christ's Beatitudes can provide great solace for the afflicted and those persecuted for holiness' sake, provided that such a focus is meant to give hope that the suffering on this earth is not irrevocable, and part of that solace is to strive to prevent similar suffering in others. John Paul II's stress on the transcendence of self-giving love and the example of the Good Samaritan emphasises this praxic approach. Is this calling possible in all circumstances of suffering? While I can see how a Karl Leisner was theologically attuned to see his life as one of self-giving love to others and God, what of those who were not capable or aware of such an option? Calling "rejoicing in suffering the "final step" also implies that everyone should reach that plateau, when the most ethical responses to some suffering may not be to rejoice, but to grieve and protest and funnel that energy into aiding others in a similar plight. There also remains the question of how this 'rejoicing' is applicable to non-Christian victims of horrific suffering.

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66. John Paul II, *Memory and Identity,* 190.

5. Christ's Solidarity with other Victims of Atrocity

In one section of the encyclical, John Paul II reaches out to non-Christians.[67] He writes: *"the glory that is hidden in the very sufferings of Christ"* which proclaims the "glory of the future age" is "often mirrored in human suffering, as an expression of man's spiritual greatness". Thus, John Paul continues: "This glory must be acknowledged not only in the martyrs for the faith but in many others also who, at times, even without knowing Christ, suffer and give their lives for the truth and for a just cause. In the sufferings of all these people the great dignity of man is strikingly confirmed".[68]

John Paul II therefore proposes that another potential redemptive element of suffering is " to manifest the moral greatness of man" or to reveal one's spiritual maturation. This last point is linked with suffering, giving us the opportunity to attain and practice the virtue of perseverance[69] and not to let suffering dominate our theological and spiritual faith. In partaking in God's love, John Paul II writes, "man rediscovers himself more and more fully in suffering: he rediscovers the 'soul' which he thought he had 'lost' because of suffering".[70]

These are also beautiful words, but are they applicable to Donathille or to a victim of child abuse? For the Jewish Theologian Emil Fackenheim, "to find redemption in the suffering of these babies [burned alive in the camps], or of those cursed to hear their screams, is a human impossibility and – so one hopes – a divine one as well".[71] For Fackenheim, the gulf between Christ and these victims is not on account of the claimed divinity of the former. It is because for these Jewish victims there was no choice. As Jews, they were already 'destined' for murder under Nazi ideology. As Fackenheim argues, Rabbi Akiba – and the other martyrs during the Hadrianic persecutions – could decide "how, if not whether, to die". The Jews of the Holocaust could not. Fackenheim writes: "Hadrian created Jewish martyrs. Hitler murdered not only Jews but also Jewish martyrdom".[72] While there are some

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67. The encyclical addresses the bishops, priests, religious families, and the "faithful" of the Catholic Church. Based on the salutation, this letter is not addressed to the Partnoys of the world, an omission that limits the value and interpretation of John Paul II's exegesis of the meaning of suffering.

68. John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 22.

69. In quoting Kierkegaard, D.Z. Philips also speaks of patience: see *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 2004), 212.

70. John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 23.

71. Emil Fackenheim, "Auschwitz as Challenge to Philosophy and Theology", in *To Mend the World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xivi.

72. Ibid., xlii.

individual exceptions,[73] I agree with Fackenheim. The dominant focus instead should be to address how these victims are not to blame, how God wants to heal them, that their anger is justified, and that the issue of a soul being lost is irrelevant.

6. The Need for Uncertainty and Agitation in Jesus of Nazareth

While the encyclical provides ample material stressing Jesus as redeemer, a greater emphasis on Jesus's humanity would provide a clearer sense of how human beings can also share in Christ's redemption. Such a focus would also clarify what suffering "accomplishes" according to John Paul II. He writes that Jesus heads towards "his Passion and death with full awareness of the mission he has to fulfil precisely in this way – [through suffering]".[74] While a reading of John's gospel in particular supports this interpretation, turning to Mark's Gospel here would seem more pastorally effective when examining the possibility to participate in redemptive suffering. As David Neville writes: "Because Mark refused to soften the stark reality of Jesus' suffering, his crucifixion narrative is more likely to provide insight into the realities of evil and suffering as well as resources for grappling with these overwhelming forces".[75] Mark's gospel better enables one to emphasise how Christ gradually comprehends the full extent of his mission, does not know every detail of what will occur, who himself suffers, and is agitated at times, but courageously chooses to remain faithful to what he perceives to be the truth even with the likelihood of death.[76] Such a depiction would have prevented the possibility of inadvertently distancing Jesus of Nazareth from most other sufferers who do not seek or expect full suffering but for whom it comes with a knock on the door in the middle of the night, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn reminds us.[77]

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73. Joseph Bau's wife, Rebecca, removed her own name from "Schindler's List" and replaced it with her husband's so he would be taken to work in Schindler's factory. She instead was transferred to Auschwitz but survived. See his *Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry?*, trans. Shlomo Yurman (New York: Arcade, 1996), translator's note, 158.

74. John Paul II, *Salvifici*, Par. 16.

75. David Neville, "God's Presence and Power: Christology, Eschatology, and 'Theodicy' in Mark's Crucifixion Narrative", in *Theodicy and Eschatology*, eds. Bruce Barber and David Neville (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 21.

76. At times, Jesus in Mark's gospel seems to have a little less full certainty. He is "distressed and agitated" in Gethsemane (14:33), and his cry from the cross could be interpreted as a sense of abandonment (he does not quote the hopeful end of Psalm 22). This contrasts with a more self-assured Jesus in John and the absence of any such cry from the cross in Luke or John. At one point (Mk 9:1) Jesus also seems to think the second coming will be soon, though this also depends on how one interprets "the kingdom of God". His assertion for the need for watchfulness because no one knows the time or day (Mk 13:32) also needs to be factored in. Regardless, not every detail seemed foreknown in advance but was a gradual unfolding. I am arguing that this space of uncertainty is extremely important to adhere to if one wants to link Christ's experience with the suffering of other human beings.

77. "The Universe has as many different centers as there are living beings in it. Each of us

Therefore, to show Christ's humanity and connection with the suffering victim,[78] one needs to accentuate Jesus's sense of uncertainty, agitation, and anxiety. Evil and suffering are most heinous when they are utterly unexpected, not chosen, and degrading (especially if it incorporates the suffering of loved ones). Plenty of individuals have had a fairly accurate anticipation of what would happen to them if they committed a certain act. On his way to martyrdom, Ignatius of Antioch writes in his epistle to the Romans: "For my part, I am writing to all the churches and assuring them that I am truly in earnest about dying for God – if only you yourselves put no obstacles in the way. I must implore you to do me no such untimely kindness; pray leave me to be a meal for the beasts, for it is they who can provide my way to God".[79] Like Rabbi Akiba, he knew torture and death would follow his refusal to worship the Roman gods.[80]

At stake here is whether Christ, if ceded this full-awareness of his mission and purpose, remains the best model for those who suffer, who either have no idea why they are being tortured or murdered or know the reason is trivial or a mistake. As Phillips writes: "One misses something essential if one treats them [the Suffering Servant and the Passion of Christ] simply as marvellous examples of voluntary self-sacrifice. This leaves out the bitterness in the fact that they are *broken*. That cannot be accepted as a voluntary acceptance by the will".[81]

While the language of brokenness needs further qualifiers because Jesus persevered (and through the resurrection, triumphed), descriptions that stress Jesus's vulnerability are ones which human beings can better relate to and be in solidarity with. Such depictions also share a greater affinity with testimonies of mass atrocity.

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is a center of the Universe and that Universe is shattered when they hiss at you: 'You are under arrest.'

But the darkened mind is incapable of embracing these displacements in our universe, and both the most sophisticated and the veriest simpleton among us, drawing on all life's experiences, can gasp out only, 'Me? What for?'

And this is a question, which, though repeated millions and millions of times, has yet to receive an answer." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 3-4.

78. In *Christ and Horrors*: *The Coherence of Christology,* McCord Adams writes: "Overall, the scholastics painted a portrait of Christ's human nature as highly advantaged in comparison with ours" [(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59].

79. Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Romans", in *Early Christian Writings*, trans. Andrew Louth (Penguin: London, 1987), 86.

80. Harbouring Hutus during Rwanda's most recent genocide, or speaking out against Mao or Stalin was also a guaranteed death sentence.

81. Phillips, *Problem of Evil*, 272. This interpretation of Jesus's suffering does not address a child abused, or those persecuted who do not belong to a cause or group. In fact, Jean Améry notes that unlike the isolated intellectuals, those who were Catholic, Communist, or Jehovah Witness had a greater chance of survival because they were not facing their ordeals alone and had an ideology to combat the Nazi policy of dehumanisation (*At the Mind's Limits*, 13).

Simone Weil succinctly touches upon what I have been concerned with above, namely the need to clarify Levinas's sense of useless suffering with what can be deemed John Paul II's potentially 'meaningful' suffering and the need to highlight what I would call the humanisation of Christ's bodily and earthly suffering. Weil writes: "The martyrs who came into the arena singing as they faced the wild beasts were not afflicted. Christ was afflicted. He did not die like a martyr. He died like a common criminal, in the same class as thieves, only a little more ridiculous. For affliction is ridiculous".[82] Weil's interpretation clashes with John Paul II's above, but while also needing clarification, especially in the need to link Jesus's 'criminality' with his living and dying in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, it opens up a greater connection for an intimate and possible *imitatio Christi*. If, indeed, the mission of Jesus is to establish the kingdom of God on earth through a life focused on liberating the poor and oppressed and instances of injustice in our world, then such participation is clear and possible to emulate,[83] but seems other-worldly if Jesus simply looks upon such suffering as necessary and meant to be fulfilled. Ignacio Ellacuría neatly encapsulates the above statements: "...it cannot be forgotten that the historic Jesus sought for himself neither death nor resurrection but the proclamation of the Reign of God to the point of death, and that brought resurrection".[84]

III. Assessment

John Paul II's highlighting of the possibility for a suffering victim to share in Christ's redeeming mission can be a great pastoral gift to many individuals because it connects that suffering to a greater good (the self-giving in love to others, thus sharing in the ongoing redemption wrought by Christ), gives hope that such suffering will not have the final word, and provides an example of how to respond to the suffering of others and one's own afflictions.

Nevertheless, gaps still remain in this encyclical's relevance to all types of suffering and in the need for greater clarification with some of its terms. Nigel

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82. Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction", in *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: David McKay Company, 1977), 445. Weil writes that "affliction is an uprooting of life, a more or less attenuated equivalent of death, made irresistibly present to the soul by the attack or immediate apprehension of physical pain" (440).

83. Note that such a focus need not be opposed to interpretations of Christ as the new 'Adam' and overcoming sin and death in sacrificial terms or his overcoming original sin. Nor is it antithetical to eschatological interpretation, as I will investigate more closely in the liberation theology chapters.

Biggar in his *Aiming to Kill, The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia*, writes: "John Paul's grasp of the role of Christ's suffering in bringing about human salvation from sin is less than exact. In a single sentence he writes of the operation of Christ's suffering in terms that allude to scapegoating, to the making of satisfaction, and to the power of love".[85] This lack of clarity causes "the unanswered questions [to] pile up". Biggar continues:

> What exactly is the relation between human sin and suffering? How much sense does it make to treat the condition of suffering as a universal entity, existing independently of actual sinful subjects? What does it mean to 'link' human suffering to love? In what sense is suffering thereby made redemptive? And how can Christ's redemptive work of suffering be both complete and in the process of being completed?[86]

Using Biggar's questions and applying the testimonies of a Partnoy or Gyatso to John Paul II's encyclical does not produce satisfactory answers. In addition to the above questions, I also share Biggar's concern with the encyclical's implication of a "cheap grace" in which "sin is overcome simply and completely by God's work [while] we, it seems have to do nothing except enjoy the benefits".[87] Does John Paul II's setting the bar here to make all suffering a means to share in Christ's suffering again emphasise passivity and resignation? While I tried to offer a way to avoid this dilemma, the encyclical needed to address this issue in more detail.

Moreover, Biggar argues that it is possible to participate in the redemptive suffering brought about by Jesus through imitating His suffering – living a life of discipleship – by "enduring this kind of suffering, by absorbing injury and meeting it with compassion, by forgiving others".[88] However, he contends that the only way to 'salvage' John Paul's argument for the sufferer's sharing in the redemption of Christ is to "Regard human suffering as redemptive, but only of a certain kind, namely, the compassionate and forgiving suffering of injury. Other, physical kinds of human suffering cannot be redemptive in the strong sense of imitating the compassion and forgiveness of God in Christ".[89] Biggar does acknowledge these physical sufferings

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84. Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People" in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Phillip Berryman and Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis, 1993), 589.

85. Nigel Biggar, *Aiming to Kill, The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia* (London: DLT, 2004), 51.

86. Ibid., 52.

87. Ibid., 53.

88. Ibid., 54.

89. Ibid., 54.

could be 'redemptive' in another, weaker sense" though.[90] As noted above, I share Biggar's concern against linking all suffering as redemptive, especially when one turns to victims of horrific evil.

The encyclical's important point, though, is to open up the possibility for some suffering to be a conduit for inspiration, faith, and grace and the opportunity for the sufferer – in what seems a meaningless, horrific plight – to find purpose and dignity. We saw this process lived out in my brief look in Chapter Two at the Catholic martyr Karl Leisner in the death camps. But I am less certain to apply these points to cases of child abuse or every instance of horrific suffering as exemplified by Donathille's ordeal referred to above. Such participation and redemption is possible for them, of course, but I would hesitate to apply most of John Paul II's language on suffering to every individual who had to undergo senseless, horrific torture or abuse.

In short, I am sympathetic to John Paul II's claim that Christ can be presented as the ultimate answer to the problem of evil. I also concur with his aim to show how we are called to respond to our own suffering and to the suffering of others as a means to share in healing and redemption. However, at stake is whether the hope and optimism of the encyclical's language can be applied to cases that seem beyond redemption. John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris* does not explicitly treat these cases in great detail, but my following text does.

90. Ibid., 55.

Chapter Five

HORRENDOUS EVILS AND REDEMPTION FOR ALL: MARILYN MCCORD-ADAMS'S 'THEODICY'

Imagination decides everything…[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Human Cargo*: *A Journey Among Refugees*, Caroline Moorehead identifies some of the key concerns of Helen Bamber's Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture:

> How do you coax back to a bearable existence people whose bodies have been attacked, whose brains and memories have been weakened by blows to the head, whose privacy and pride have been invaded by rape and sexual assault, who have seen their families destroyed, and have lost everything that once mattered to them, though they have done nothing wrong?[2]

Such questions are at the heart of Marilyn McCord Adams's *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, which focuses on how meaningful redemption can still be possible for the horror participant, especially because of our post-mortem encounter with a personal, omnipotent, and imaginative God (see epigraph above).[3] Thus, I will examine whether McCord Adams's project succeeds where Phillips claims it fails.[4] I will also examine whether her denial of a "morally-good God" and her support for a return of the language of aesthetics weakens or contributes to a theodicy. Lastly, I will test whether her theological attempts help to answer some of Helen Bamber's concerns above, which have great affinity with my own investigations in this work.

II. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF *HORRENDOUS EVILS AND THE GOODNESS OF GOD*

A. SCEPTICAL OF THEODICY

While Adams and Phillips differ on the possibility of redemption and healing in an

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1. Pascal, *Penseés*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), 41.

2. Caroline Moorhead, *Human Cargo: A Journey Among Refugees* (New York: Picador, 2006), 270-1.

3. Adams writes: "horror-defeating power is meaning-restoring power, and meaning-making is personal activity par excellence!" [*Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 82].

4. D.Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 2004), 271.

afterlife context, Adams would seem to agree with the gist of Phillips's argument against theodicies for trying to justify the unjustifiable. Though recalling Anselm's reminder that "the mystery of Divine Goodness is permanently inexhaustible to us",[5] Adams, like Phillips, cannot accept any so-called reasons that supervene the value of an individual human life. She writes: "[T]he attempt to turn these considerations into so-called morally sufficient reasons why God has permitted horrors worsens the problem of Divine goodness to horror participants by suggesting that God cares more about such cosmic considerations than about human beings".[6] As she also notes in *Christ and Horrors*, "...talk of theodicy – *justifying* the ways of God to humankind – is misleading because God has no obligations to creatures and hence no need to *justify* Divine actions to us. Personal though God is, the metaphysical size-gap is too big for God to be drawn into the network of rights and obligations that bind together merely human beings".[7] She will instead steer a middle course between justifying and explaining.[8] While I do not find her distinction very helpful,[9] of more concern for me is the possible negative repercussions that may result from denying God's lack of obligation to us without sufficient clarification, an issue I will take up further below.

B. The Horrendous

Adams emphasises the 'horrendous' because the word connotes the worst of all objective evils.[10] She defines the 'horrendous' as:

> evils the participation in which (that is the doing or suffering of which) constitute *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole.... In most (if not all) cases, the destructive force of horrors extends beyond their concrete disvalue (such as pain and material deprivation) to invade the

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5. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 54.

6. Marilyn McCord Adams, "Afterword", in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 196.

7. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 43.

8. Ibid., 43.

9. I do not find such a distinction useful in a theodic context because many explanations, especially within a theodicy, are rarely value-free assertions, bereft of desires, motivations, and faith-beliefs. I would claim these qualities are embedded within most theodic explanations, and so share similar characteristics with the traditional practice of seeking justificatory reasons in a theodicy, though strictly speaking, to justify entails the additional step of claiming why a proposition is right, proper, or necessary.

10. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 26. Similar to Adams's definition of 'horrendous' above, I am trying to assess whether mass atrocity inflicts an especially divisive and potentially destructive assault on meaning and the viability of theodicy.

> deep structure of the person's frameworks of meaning-making and seemingly defeat the individual's value as a person....Thus paradigm horrors ... degrade the victim and the perpetrator (if any) as well.[11]

At stake is whether some types of suffering refute any assertion of a God of love and redemption and raze any meaning and value of an individual life (and so life *in toto*). Like Job's complaint: "[W]hy was I not like a buried stillbirth, / Like babies who never saw the light?",[12] for some individuals non-existence or death seems more appealing than life. A viable theodicy, therefore, is denied.

For redemption to be possible for both victim and perpetrator, McCord Adams specifies her criteria: "I assume that for an individual's life to be a great good *to him/her* on the whole, it is not enough for good to balance off or defeat evil *objectively speaking.* The individual involved must him/herself also recognise and appropriate at least some of those positive meanings".[13] One issue is whether some individuals have never experienced or recognised any act of meaningful goodness towards them.[14] While McCord Adams will underscore how God can heal anyone, other individuals like Alexander Donat state they will never forgive, forget, or understand the inexplicable horror they had to undergo:

> From the depths of our disaster, amid the hangings, the gas chambers, and the incomprehensible madness of evil, we shouted: 'Omnipotent God, merciful and compassionate one, where are you?' We searched for Him, but we did not find Him. The maddening and humbling feeling of the absence of the Divine accompanied us constantly. The experience is eternal, unforgettable.[15]

While Donat was a survivor of the Holocaust, thinkers like Reeve Brenner maintain they will refuse to forget or understand on account of victims who have suffered horrendously. Brenner writes: "God is not to be disavowed, declared untrue or disclaimed. He is to be accused publicly in a solemn, formal charge. He is then to be

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11. Ibid., 26.
12. Job 3:16.
13. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 82.
14. As a social worker to drug addicted mothers in Jamaica, New York, my sister once asked a client if she knew of anyone who had ever been kind to her (the client's own mother had abused and abandoned her). The woman could not name anyone. Such cases are not singular, unfortunately, especially if one thinks of some of the children who grew up and died in concentration camps or gulags, or who have been forced to be prostitutes, child soldiers, or slaves. In addition, while there are myriad reasons for why individuals have committed suicide, among these, are surely cases where some individuals saw no hope in this world because no goodness or potential hope was offered to them.

cast off, repudiated and rejected, for by his inaction, He Himself became party to the cruel injustice of the indiscriminate bloodshed – a God whose failure is never to be forgiven".[16] In this instance Brenner believes God is guilty for permitting these atrocities and so he provides little ground for God to convince that such acts can be overcome by healing and goodness in the post-mortem state. Wiesel has noted that he will go on praying to God, but thinks he will never be satisfied by God's answers,[17] while Roy and Alice Eckhardt contend: "the only penitential act we know for God is his expression of genuine sorrow for his place in the unparalleled agony of his people".[18] These views, at the least, show that the process of God "convincing" some people may not be an automatic result, notwithstanding what Adams calls God's "superlative imagination", as will be detailed further below.[19] Keeping this tension of God's 'convincing' in mind, I now want to address why McCord Adams wants to minimise one's use of moral categories when examining horrendous evils.

C. Reclaiming the Language of Purity and Honour

For McCord Adams, moral categories are deficient in addressing horrendous evils. In *Christ and Horrors* she refers to the "lameness of moral categories"[20] while in *Horrendous Evils* she writes that "horror perpetration is no simple function of moral wrongdoing"[21] as we often unknowingly and unintentionally produce horrors. Adding that "neither the Bible nor the major medieval and reformation theologians assert that God is *morally* good",[22] she looks for an alternative "system of interpersonal evaluation" and takes from social anthropology that there are competing claims that could be useful in a theodic context, particularly the categories of purity and defilement and honour and shame.[23] For Adams the purity and defilement category is better suited than moral categories "to grasp the fundamental problem in Divine-human relations as well as for identifying the source

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15. Alexander Donat, "Voice From the Ashes: Wanderings in Search of God", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 276.

16. Reeve Brenner, *Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors* (Free Press, 1980), 224.

17. See the selection from his memoir, *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 682-4.

18. Alice and Roy Eckhardt, *Long Day's Journey into Night: A Revised Retrospective on the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 69.

19. McCord Adams, *Horrendous,* 82.

20. McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 36.

21. McCord Adams, *Horrendous,* 60-1.

22. Ibid., 61.

and conceptualising the trouble with horrors". She argues that this category forces us to see our defilement compared to God's purity, thus minimising the dangers of over-stressing "agent competence, indeed, to overestimate the capacity to subdue, with discipline, one's lower nature and to shoulder the responsibility to decide one's own destiny… [T]he lens of purity and defilement…replace[s] a priori idealized models with a more empirical psychology".[24] She also claims such a focus "is a good translation of Biblical and traditional declarations that God is holy while creatures are unclean".[25]

The category of honour and shame for Adams also underscores what persons are and not what they do[26] and introduces symbolic language into the discussion. Such symbolic language recognises how horrendous evils have the power to "degrade" personal meaning,[27] which is why Adams stresses God as the ultimate meaning maker, fully 'equipped' with Divine Imagination. She contends that the honour code "is better equipped than morality [sometimes she refers to 'modern' morality[28]] to conceptualize the problems posed by horrendous evil"[29] because it is "ideally suited to plumb the depths of what's wrong with horrors: namely their power to degrade by symbolizing that one is subhuman or worthless".[30] Other reasons include the code's highlighting of the "limits and source of human dignity", its denial of divine obligations (such a denial prevents one claiming God failed certain tests and so must not exist), the fact honour "can still be exchanged even when concrete needs are still lacking" or "fully supplied", and also because the honour code "*allows universalists to explain how in the Judgement, we will recognise how ascriptive honor is the cure*".[31]

Before I proceed to critique these alternative means to conceptualise the problem of evil, I need to address McCord Adams's hesitation to call God "morally good", as this will bear on whether her alternative conceptions are more valid than moral categories.

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23. Ibid., 61.
24. Ibid., 103.
25. Ibid., 86. Issues of purity and impurity, of course, dominate certain biblical texts (Leviticus and Deuteronomy) and the socio-historical context of the Christian Gospels, as seen with Christ's healing of lepers or the woman with the hemorrhage. The cross is also considered the ultimate act of restoring purity to what had been defiled (98).
26. Ibid., 107.
27. Ibid., 124.
28. Ibid., 125.
29. Ibid., 124.
30. Ibid., 124.
31. Ibid., 126-7.

D. Is God then Immoral?

As noted in Chapter Three, Phillips highlights the problems of rendering God as a "fellow" member of our moral community, though his aim is to show the failure of theodic propositions. Adams will disavow theodicy and a morally-good God, but still aim to prove how God can defeat horrendous evils. She writes: "human society involves role expectations and some system(s) of mutual evaluation and accountability. Relative to my opponents, I have celebrated this fact by dwelling on how humans have invented and deployed a variety of such schemes – the purity and defilement calculus, the honor code, and most recently, morality".[32] Morality as Adams conceives it, is a human-devised system that often seeks to judge God on human moral terms, as if there is no metaphysical size gap between God and humanity. McCord Adams wants instead to emphasise that God is not enslaved by our "lame" moral categories.

In support of Adams's position, Brian Davies contends that arguments based on God's moral goodness (that God is "well behaved"[33]) falsely claim to be traditional and biblically-based.[34] Contending that theists must also emphasise that God is "radically incomprehensible",[35] Davies wants to maintain that "...for God to create just is for him to bring about what is good. For something is good only in so far as it exists and succeeds in being in some way, and what God brings about is, and is only, that things exist".[36] For Peter van Inwagan on the other hand, "that God is morally perfect is a 'non-negotiable' element of theism".[37] I am particularly interested in analysing what gets lost in translation when Adams, Davies, and others deny the claim that God is moral in our contemporary situation of genocide, ecological crises, and endemic poverty.

What is implied if morality is simply a human affair? For Adams, is Christian morality not founded upon God's ongoing revelation in the Bible and in the life and witness of Christ? While diverse interpretations (some of which are clearly rooted in cultural constructs) outline the severity and conditions of moral and immoral acts, is it not standard Christian hope that the Holy Sprit – an "agency-enabler" in Adams's

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32. Ibid., 192.

33. Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2006), 86. The term "well-behaved" is certainly provocative, but it is also ethically inappropriate in this context. When millions of lives, battered, broken, and dehumanized, are at stake, and the question is the issue of God's relationship with these victims and the evil and suffering that are rampant in the world God created, the issue should not be phrased in the same way one speaks of a dog or children.

34. Ibid., 87.

35. Ibid., 92.

36. Ibid., 193.

language[38] – works through individuals ("The Church" for John Paul II) to bring humanity to a closer relationship with God through right actions and right knowledge? In the section "Dignity of the Human Person" in *Gaudium Et Spes,* we read: "In a wonderful manner conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor. In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of men in the search for truth…Hence, the more that a correct conscience holds sway, the persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by objective norms of morality".[39] That Christianity decries slavery in any form today and deems it immoral is not merely a cultural, human-devised decree. For Christians, it is rooted in a greater understanding of revelation and a more mature following of Christ. In a world of mass atrocity, jettisoning a connection between God and morality would only seem to muddle how a theist is able to identify and find a ground for censuring immoral actions.

For Adams, though, not calling God moral also overcomes talk of God's obligation to us based on these faulty or lame moral categories. In fact, Adams supports the language of honour and shame over morality when dealing with the problem of evil in part because "according to the honour code, God has no obligation either to take on God's clients or to service them once acquired".[40] According to the honour code, through covenantal relationships between God (the patron-king) and God's people (vassals), God's honour (as the patron or master) becomes invested in what happens to the people (patrons), and so what happens to them will reflect on God.[41] God does not act because God owes the people anything. She similarly asserts that covenants in the bible do not involve God "taking on obligations to created individuals or nations…Rather, God accommodates Himself to the human conditions to assure us of Divine good will".[42]

To illustrate Adams's contention, recall the story of Moses's intervention for the Israelites when they doubted whether they could conquer the Holy Land.[43]

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37. Ibid., 105, n. 10.

38. McCord Adams, *Horrendous,* 104.

39. "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World", in *The Documents of Vatican II,* ed. Walter N. Abbot, trans. ed. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, 1966), par. 16 (213).

40. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 112. Note that the issue of God's obligation is another charged issue which I will address in the next section.

41. A similar rationale will be seen in the law court pattern of prayer in my discussion of theological protest in the Jewish tradition in Chapter Eight. However, in that tradition, God has clear obligations to God's people.

42. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 96. We will see a vastly different interpretation by many post-Holocaust Jewish theologians in Chapters Eight and Nine.

43. Numbers 14:13-16. Like a wily lawyer, Moses pleads to God: "When the Egyptians,

Moses does not argue on the basis of morality, but on God's honour. In fact, from God's command to the Israelites to commit genocide on foreign tribes[44] to calling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac,[45] biblical texts that attribute to God questionable moral acts or designs are not wanting. Nevertheless, one can turn to various schools of literary criticism or historical-biblical criticism to argue how best to read or interpret a biblical text without having to renounce that God is morally good.[46] Contradictions are rife in the Bible and some interpretive choices have to be made; however, on the whole, incidents of an amoral God stand out because they are relatively rare when interspersed with dominant biblical tropes and themes. Our failure to reach and comprehend the "ultimate norms of morality" that *Gaudium Et Spes* proclaims should not give us reason to minimise the value of moral categories because our striving to improve and clarify such norms is a fundamental calling to be Christian, and so is prerequisite for a theodicy.

At the same time, belief in moral progress has certainly been undermined because of the catastrophic events of the twentieth century, as Jonathan Glover writes in his *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*,[47] but such events also mobilise a greater calling to decry and denounce whatever degrades and dehumanises the value of life. They are brutal reminders that failure to label and rebuke such crimes has dire consequences for everyone. Nevertheless, while I am not convinced for the need to go beyond good and evil in the strictly Nietzschean sense, I share with Nietzsche the conviction that often what seems good and bad is far from the case, and so some – but not all – values may need revaluing. It certainly calls for a moral language that constantly seeks to be challenged and clarified.

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from whose midst You brought up this people in Your might, hear the news, they will tell it to the inhabitants of that land … If then You slay this people to a man, the nations who have heard Your fame will say, 'It must be because the Lord was powerless to bring that people into the land He promised them on oath that He slaughtered them in the wilderness'".

44. Joshua 8:2; 8:24-6.

45. Genesis 22:2.

46. It would seem more reasonable to maintain a morally good God and to question the literal reading of those morally-problematic passages in the Bible that portray an amoral, or even immoral God. To cede them equally authoritative or inspired status compared to texts that emphasise a God of love and justice would be to misread the Bible; likewise with immoral actions deemed moral ones. In Chapter Eight I will examine how the rabbis of the Talmud primarily try to work through biblical stories that imply that God is not being just or good to find (or even 'create') a reason to disprove those implications. That chapter's focus, however, will be on the key figures and texts that engage in the tradition of theological protest, a marginal, but still deeply-rooted Jewish theological practice. In Chapter Seven, I will also examine Terrence Tilley's interpretation of the Book of Job, which critiques Gustavo Gutiérrez's didactic reading of Job by siding with the claims that such a tale should be identified as a "text of terror" and was meant to forewarn against the "evils of theodicy" that theodicists later perpetuated.

47. Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2001), 2.

Returning to McCord Adams's alternative categories, I need to clarify that like the Talmudic rabbis, McCord Adams would have major problems ascribing immoral acts to God. However, what meaning does honour or shame and purity or defilement have for speaking about God and the problem of evil if God is not deemed morally good? Using the language of honour and shame is simply another way to frame and articulate the moral argument in which categories like purity and impurity mask or perform the traditional role of morality and immorality. If these other categories are ultimately to have any meaning, they are subsumed and defined by moral codes (and for a Christian like Adams, such moral codes are underwritten by the Christian Bible and tradition). Honour can be a good, but it is only a corollary of it; its meaning depends upon the good, not vice versa. These alternative models, therefore, seem best as supplementary ones to moral categories.

E. Contrasting Anthropological Starting Points

Although McCord Adams claims that she affirms human responsibility, a dominant strand within her work is spent minimising the profound connections between human identity and actions.[48] This has profound negative consequences for the dominant themes and language of her reflection on evil. While Adams believes her alternative categories are useful because they stress what human beings are and not what they do, it is difficult to separate this dichotomy so smoothly. In this light, issues of doubling, compartmentalising, or self-denial can play a role in enabling individuals to deceive themselves in justifying immoral actions and could be applied to discussing how individuals can still be considered capable of the good despite past or present evil they commit. A balance must be struck between ceding sufficient moral responsibility to human beings (and so not conflating the child burned in the pits with the Nazis who implemented, ordered, and enacted the policy) while recognising that human freedom is always constrained in some way and one's intentions are never fully reflected in the consequences of one's actions. This position in no way minimises our moral responsibility for ignorance or carelessness, as Aristotle correctly notes.[49] Likewise, external factors (education, family upbringing, societal and religious norms) may play a dominant role in forming and

48. McCord Adams, *Horrendous,* 86.

49. "We punish those who are ignorant of anything in the laws that they ought to know and that is not difficult, and so too in anything else that they are thought to be ignorant of through carelessness; we assume that it is in their power not to be ignorant, since they have the power of taking care" [Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* in *Introduction to Aristotle*, trans. and ed. Richard McKeon (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977), III.5 (358)].

articulating one's moral horizon and language.

To illustrate some of the consequences of McCord Adams's contentions that God is holy while human beings are "unclean", I want to return to Didier Pollefeyt, whose position resonates with much of the writing of John Paul II, but is particularly applicable for my project because it is written in the context of mass atrocity, yet avoids pessimism or naïveté. As Pollefeyt writes: "In Holocaust education, students should discover that human evil is a possibility, but so is human holiness".[50] We cannot minimise either reality, along with the myriad possibilities inherent within Levi's "grey zone". While identifying the presupposition to his approach to Post-Holocaust ethics, Pollefeyt writes:

> Every human being, in being *human*, is structurally capable of developing an openness in himself or herself toward the vulnerability of the other. Consequently, I begin with an optimistic (theological) anthropology: every human being is capable of experiencing good and evil, or even stronger, each person discovers himself or herself as ethical, as connected with the good, even before he or she has consciously chosen good or evil. This ethical capacity of human beings can be selectively neutralised by a modern society or manipulated by a (democratic or totalitarian) society, but even then the basic connection with the good remains, if only in a perverted way.[51]

Pollefeyt recognises that one's capacity for the good can be constrained by exterior factors, but one is never beyond redemption. Such a position posits the goodness of humanity from an outside (theological) source while advocating a Levinasian-like calling to be "open to the vulnerability of the other".[52] Pollefeyt here strikes a proper balance between stressing individual choice and constrained freedom along with advocating responsibility for one's actions with the possibility to repent of wrongdoing. While one's actions in this life never have the final word on one's essential nature, responsibility and choice remain crucial in forming and developing one's character. Because Adams will not affirm God as moral and characterises human beings as "unclean", her resultant anthropology is not able to speak as

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50. Didier Pollefeyt, "Religious and Ethical Teaching of the Holocaust", in *Testimony, Tensions, and Tikkun:Teaching the Holocaust in Colleges and Universities*, eds. Myrna Goldenberg and Rochelle L. Millen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 181.

51. Didier Pollefeyt, "The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust: Response", in *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives: Critiques, and Responses*, ed. John Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 275-6.

52. Didier Pollefeyt, "The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust", in *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives: Critiques, and Responses*, 239.

profoundly and hopefully as Pollefeyt's would for a victim or perpetrator. Similar to any belief that accentuates humankind's wretchedness or depravity, following Adams' starting point could blind one in being able to recognise the goodness of humanity, a goodness that Christians affirm to be inspired and sustained by the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit. As exemplified in Chapter Two with Partnoy doing everything in her power to spare young Benja from further torture, such goodness even thrives under depersonalised and inhumane conditions.

To summarise these last few sections: Adams's tendency to separate and overemphasise one's being from one's actions and her refusal to proclaim a moral God[53] exposes some major flaws in her system and undermines the crucial roles of freedom, responsibility, integrity, and conscience. While adamant that "she does not deny great moral responsibility or culpability for deeds thus inadequately conceived by their agents",[54] she minimises these elements too drastically. The human person that emerges seems a faded shadow of our potential and essence.

F. The Return of Aesthetics in Theodicy

In addition to advocating alternative conceptual models and language for the problem of evil, Adams also wants to return the category of aesthetics back into a discussion of theodicy, but here boldly placed in relation to horrendous evils. She states that the 'horrendous' is itself an aesthetic category and that "aesthetic goodness can play a significant role in Divine defeat of evils".[55] To make this aesthetic claim she will accentuate the creative imagination and goodness of God to defeat this evil.

One can imagine the difficulty of returning the language of aesthetics in a theodicy after the horrors of the last century.[56] Recall Little Eleanora, for example.

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53. In *Christ and Horrors*, Adams writes: "Thus, the Gospels give us a Jesus who was not only a victim, but also an occasioner and a perpetrator of horrors…[for] He joined every other subject in collective complicity in the horrors wrought by Rome" (71). As an example she gives the case of his supposed advocating of paying taxes to Caesar. The example may not be apt as Ched Myers convincingly argues. Jesus, who does not have any money, asks to see a coin which has the inscription that labels Augustus a God, sacrilege for a Jew and so a clear case of blasphemy. Giving unto Caesar does not mean Christ advocated taxes to Caesar and so is an unwitting perpetrator of horrors. Instead he was challenging his interlocutors' allegiances. See Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (New York: Orbis, 1992).

54. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 38.

55. Ibid., 61.

56. Regarding Augustine's Plotinian use of degrees of plenitude within creation and the existence of evil, John Hick argues that individuals seem to become instruments, or bits of thread to be spun and woven into an ultimate tapestry in the eschaton where all goods – in relation to the defeated evils – will be aesthetically pleasing. He writes: "The suggestion is that in making a dependent world God has given being to a maximum range of forms of existence, constituting a hierarchy that descends from the highest archangel to the lowest amoeba or virus. Such a world

Anticipating potential criticism, McCord Adams seeks aestheticism's renewal by emphasising God's aesthetic powers to defeat these evils. Keeping in mind a God of 'superlative' imagination (among other attributes), she writes: "given the horrendous evils God permits, God must have extraordinary aesthetic imagination to overcome them".[57] Here Adams is alluding to the concern of many antitheodicists like Phillips or John Roth who contend that there are some evils so horrific that they are beyond justification or redemption. For Roth, Rummel's 'conservative' estimation of 169 million murders in the twentieth century from democide (not including war dead)[58] "stand in jarring conflict with Adams's optimistic claim. How are those problems to be 'defeated'? That question", Roth states, "remains a problem that neither Adams nor God is likely to solve".[59]

Adams agrees with Phillips and Roth that God cannot just expunge the slate post-mortem; that such an act will not defeat the evils.[60] Her answer is that "Divine *goodness* to creatures would not only balance off but *defeat* horrendous evil, and defeat it not simply within the world as a whole but within the frame of the individual's own existence".[61] This is possible because God would have the power, creativity, and goodness to defeat those evils.[62] As she adds: "God must *beautify* the person …at the very minimum God must be a modern artist".[63] She locates this possibility in particular through God's imagination and creativity: "If Divine Goodness is infinite, if intimate relation to It is thus incommensurately good for created persons, then we have identified a good big enough to defeat horrors in every case".[64] If God is perfect love and goodness, then there would be great promise and hope in believing McCord Adams's claim that those who do not acknowledge God's love are like autistic children who are not aware of parental love, but in the end, "Cognitive and emotional scales will fall and everyone will recognise the omnipresent tender loving care of God!"[65] For Adams, such hope is grounded in Christ.

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must include all those forms of life and organizations of matter whose interactions cause the mingled good and evil which we observe and experience [and so] Evils can be justified in this kind of holistic way" [John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 189].

57. McCord Adams, Horrendous, 147.
58. John K. Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest", in *Encountering Evil*, 1.
59. Ibid., 3.
60. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 48.
61. Ibid., 53.
62. McCord Adams, "Afterword", 195.
63. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 149.
64. Ibid., 82-3.
65. Ibid., 105.

III. Christological Underpinnings

A. The Coherence of Christology

Similar to John Paul II's convictions, for McCord Adams, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are crucial for additional scales to fall from eyes. Christ is the keystone to all her thought. As she writes in *Christ and Horrors*: "My topic is Christology; my thesis, the coherence of Christology, Christ as the One in whom all things hold together".[66] Adams is not only stressing a personal God but advocating the Christian God who in the hypostatic union is both fully God and fully human. Similar to my claims in Chapter Two, Adams stresses that through the human body, emotions, and experiences, Jesus endured suffering and so can particularly identify, commiserate, and be present in solidarity with all those who suffer in this life. She presents a God whose goodness, imagination, and creativity are enough to defeat all these horrors while having a unique bond with fellow sufferers in solidarity through Jesus's own ordeal and tribulations in this life.

B. Turning to the Cross: Anticipating the Beatific Vision

The role of the beatific vision – and eschatology in general – is of crucial importance for McCord Adams's 'theodicy'. She contends that "God preserves created persons alive after their death in wholesome environments, that their relationships with God resolve into beatific intimacy so that the 'sufferings of the present life' are concretely balanced off".[67] According to Adams, God will convince everyone to accept the call to repent. All will be saved. She does not speculate here on how this encounter will play out. Perhaps, then, we are all Job-like, conjuring up fantastic arguments to and against God in the realm of our private thoughts, but fall silent when God's finally speaks "out of the tempest".[68] I will return to her support of universal salvation in Chapter Ten, but I want to conclude this chapter by looking at a few problematic assertions within McCord Adams's text (some of which are related to her support of universalism) that bear on the aims of my work and which minimise the effectiveness of her position.

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66. McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 1.

67. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 162. I will return to this sense of "preserving" further below.

68. Job 38:1. Also recall the convictions of Donat and Wiesel who are adamant that they will never understand God's explanations. How one interprets Job's last line, as will be noted in Chapter Eight, can also be decisive.

IV. Questionable Assertions

A. Wishing Suffering Away

To seek this redemption for all, Adams turns to the crucifixion as a means to state God's solidarity with all who suffer to transform what was disgraceful into the ultimate good. She agrees with Moltmann that Jesus knew what it was to be abandoned by God and so God must share our suffering.[69] She also agrees that Christ is a "symbol of transformation"[70] and so suffering can now have a positive moral meaning because of Jesus' suffering and murder.[71]

Problematically, though, she writes: "Retrospectively, I believe, from the vantage point of heavenly beatitude, human victims of horrors will recognise those experiences as points of identification with the crucified God, and not wish them away from their life histories".[72] This is a claim so broad and compelling that I need to spend a few moments to test its effectiveness.[73] In *The Gulag Archipelago*, Solzhenitsyn – like Dostoyevsky prior to him[74] – encounters and reaffirms his faith in God through prison: "Bless, you, prison for having saved my life!"[75] Irina Ratushinskaya[76] and Immaculée Ilibagiza[77] make similar claims. But these voices

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69. McCord Adams, Horrendous, 176.

70. Ibid., 177.

71. Ibid., 167.

72. Ibid., 167. In *Christ and Horrors*, without offering any explanation, Adams slightly clarifies the phrasing: "So also victims of horror from the vantage point of heaven, when they recognise how God was with them in their worst experiences, will not wish to eliminate any moments of intimacy with God from their life histories" (40).

73. In her support of universalism, McCord Adams writes: "Still more amazing, God will be seen to have honored even the perpetrators of horrors by identifying with their condition, becoming ritually cursed through His death on a tree, taking His stand with the cursed to cancel the power of the curse forever!" (McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evil*, 127). It is worth questioning how Jesus's experience as a victim gives him the means to identify with all perpetrators (and I am well aware of what is referred to as 'hostage identification syndrome'). If the perpetrators were also victims, then the identification is meaningful. But it is a morally ambiguous and dangerous idea to make a claim that could imply a victim of rape or abuse is therefore able to understand and empathise with their perpetrator's intent, moral framework, and human condition. I would argue that the opposite is more likely the case or one goes into therapy to overcome identifying with the perpetrator.

74. "Inwardly alone, I reviewed the whole of my past life [and] sometimes even blessed fate for having sent me such isolation" [Dostoyevsky, *House of the Dead,* trans. David McDuff (Penguin: Middlesex, 1985), 340].

75. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (London: The Harvill Press, 1995), 313.

76. "Thank you, O Lord, that it fell to my lot to endure the rigors of prison transports, to languor in punishment cells and to starve" [Irina Ratushinskaya, *Grey is the Color of Hope,* trans. Alyona Kojevnikov (New York: Vintage, 1989), 148].

77. "In the midst of genocide, I'd found my salvation....I'd been born again in the bathroom and was now the loving daughter of God, my Father" [Immaculée Ilibagiza, with Steve Erwin, *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (Carlsbad: Hay House, 2006), 107]. A Tutsi survivor of the Rwandan genocide, Ilibagiza was forced to hide for three months with other Tutsis in a cramped bathroom. Most of her family was murdered.

are still relatively rare. The blank stares and animal-like groans of the *Muselmänner* are more than competing responses. However, if God cannot redeem all evil; if for example, the persons who have been crushed by affliction, forced to witness and participate in evils that led to their ultimate demise, cannot be in some way healed of these memories, heaven as traditionally understood is closer to hell.[78] And yet, as Phillips reminds us, our memories are linked with our being and individual identity. McCord Adams wants to maintain the integrity of all one's memory, but can one live and remember such life-destroying events and still participate fully in the beatific joy? As argued in the previous chapter, not all suffering can be or is meant as a means to identify with Christ. It is also morally problematic for an individual, traumatised from another's suffering, not to desire to wish away the horrific pain and trauma that devastated and crushed a fellow human being, even if it could be a potential means to identify with Christ. Recall the Dalai Lama's words regarding Palden Gyatso's suffering: "It was not the threat of execution that most terrified him, but the inhumanity and cruelty he was forced to witness".[79] Why would (especially the non-Christian) Gyatso not renounce the suffering of others that has also become his own suffering?

Suffering that torments, belittles, and dehumanises – that ultimately leads to nothing but shame or finally, one's murder – should not be so easily morphed into a means to identify with Christ. Gyatso maintained his humanity and example of love despite the torture – not because of it. To say God cannot find some way to heal this wound – especially as there are people among us today who have survived such trauma and find what can be called a 'meaningful life' – would be to speak presumptuously of God. But the moral and conceptual problems remain in how Adams articulates this redemption. Why would the horror victim not wish the suffering away? Is God's embrace 'greater' because of this experienced evil and would the effect not be the same without it? If horrific suffering for some individuals is the only meaningful way to identify with God, then it will take a lot of "convincing" on God's part to prove to every individual why life was good or valuable on the whole, especially if the suffering seems meaningless and was unwarranted.

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78. See, in particular, Mirolslav Wolf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapid: Wm. B. Eerdmaans Publishing Company, 2006).

79. Palden Gyatso, *Fire Under the Snow: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner*, trans. Tsering

B. DENYING GOD'S OBLIGATION

The hope of Adams's universalism may also be tarnished by her disavowal of God's obligation to us. She writes: "[M]y estimate of the size gap between God and man drives me to deny God has any obligations to creatures at all".[80] This assertion is not unique to Adams. Aquinas, for example, writes: "God owes nothing to anyone other than himself". However, he clarifies the statement, adding: "So that when you speak of his not being able to do except what he ought to do you only mean that he cannot do other than what for him is fitting and fair".[81] In Adams' second volume of *William of Ockham*, she presents Ockham's more radical claim that "God is a debtor to no one unless He has so ordained it. With respect to His absolute power, He can punish a creature without any demerit and reward a creature without merit, without any injury to the person".[82] While Ockham notes the example of Christ who was sinless and yet was crucified, Adams explains Ockham's logic in part by showing how "arbitrary actions on God's part is not necessarily foolish".[83]

It should be clear that the Supreme Being can have no obligation in the sense that I am obligated as a father to love my children. An obligation as decreed from an exterior source cannot of course apply to God. If God is the Good, then God could never simply allow evils to go unpunished and the suffering unredeemed. This is not strictly speaking, an obligation. As Aquinas hints at above, it is a matter both of being God and God's being. In this limited but important sense, God is 'obligated' (even if the obligation stems from God's Self). Furthermore, claiming that God is obligated to creatures because God chose to create this world; or in biblical language, accentuating God's covenant with humanity and the Israelites in particular, does not detract from the transcendence, ineluctability, and ineffability of God. But if God is a personal agent as McCord Adams wants to stress, then the language of obligation, though needing clarification, is still apt. To redeem evil, God does owe the victims of the bubonic plague or Auschwitz or the Tsunami of 2004 some means of redemption because God is obligated to be God. To redeem unjustified evils is a good, which is precisely why God would do so. Instead of trying to work out divine obligation with our human finite sense, it is more helpful to accentuate that God can only do what is just and merciful, and so there is no

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Shakya (London: Harvill Press, 1997), Prologue.

80. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 158.

81. Thomas Aquinas, "Why Think of God as Omnipotent?", in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 421.

82. Marilyn McCord Adams, *William of Ockham, Volume II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 1264.

83. Ibid., 1265.

question or doubt that God will endeavour to redeem and heal all individuals.[84]

C. Trying to Liberate Liberation Theology

While one would think McCord Adams's aims would find substantial agreements with liberation theology because of her focus on horror participants, she instead distances herself from that theology, critiquing some of its main ideas, including the preferential option for the poor. Much of her disagreement seems similar to common misunderstandings about liberation theology. As John D'Arcy May writes: "Far from being crypto-Marxists and advocates of revolutionary violence, the liberation theologians, by and large, were motivated from the beginning of their movement by spirituality, learned from the oppressed people themselves in 'base Christian communities', which integrates contemplation and praxis".[85] Unfortunately, McCord Adams either does not highlight these common tendencies of liberation theology in her arguments or misinterprets them.[86] While partnering with the key tenets of liberation theology would have strengthened many of her arguments, her criticism of them instead points to some weaknesses within her own position. I will not highlight every instance of her misreading of liberation theology, but only what is pertinent to my focus. This section will also serve as a link to the next two chapters, which include my evaluation of theodic texts from Jon Sobrino and Gustavo Gutiérrez.[87]

Instead of the preferential option for the poor, McCord Adams wants to assert "multisite solidarity"[88] claiming it will guarantee a focus on God being equally good to everyone. She believes that the preferential option for the poor is too partial to be applied to the ultimate aim of God's goodness to everyone.[89] It appears that she has

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84. Note that I use the word "endeavour" to maintain some sense of individual freedom, responsibility, and choice. In other words, some individuals may reject God's act of redemption and healing. I will return to this issue in Chapter Ten.

85. John D'Arcy May, *After Pluralism: Towards an Interreligious Ethic* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000), 128.

86. One of the problems of McCord Adams's criticism of liberation theology is how applicable it is to most of the major Latin American liberation theologians. The source she quotes the most from in her liberation theology critique is Rebecca Chopp's *The Praxis of Suffering*, a work of interpretation and analysis of liberation theology, when an anthology like *Mysterium Liberationis* would be more comprehensive for its inclusion of a wide-range of Latin American liberation theologians writing on a variety of themes and topics.

87. Other misconceptions include an outdated critique of some liberation theologian's use of Marxism (Adams, *Horrendous,* 197), and her claim that liberation theologians idolise the poor (200). For clear rebuttals, see Ivan Petrella, "Introduction", in *Latin American Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, ed. Ivan Petrella (New York: Orbis, 2005), xiv; and Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job, God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans., Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis, 2002), 94, respectively.

88. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 201.

89. Advocating the option for the poor necessarily involves a God who sides with the poor and oppressed, so that when conditions of truth and justice are at stake, such a God necessarily

misunderstood the term.[90] As Stephen Pope, in his helpful essay "Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option For the Poor", writes: "The preferential option, properly understood, appeals to an *expansion* rather than contraction of love and wisdom".[91]

Biblically what has to be stressed is the justice of God, a justice that aims to be fair to everyone: "You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great; with justice you shall judge your neighbor".[92] The Jewish theologian Eliezer Berkovits notes some of the tensions of a God who is impartial and yet seeks to protect the poor and oppressed, as in the biblical passage of Deuteronomy 10:18, which speaks of a God "who regards no person" while the verse immediately adds: "He does execute justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and raiment". Thus, "to seek justice is to relieve the oppressed".[93] At the same time because judging is so closely linked with ethics, impartiality under the law remained the key rule.[94]

In one sense, Pope agrees with McCord Adams by noting how there may be multiple "privileged locations" where aspects of God's goodness, mercy, and justice can be acknowledged and experienced. Poverty, or another form of marginalisation,[95] is not the only privileged location. He gives as examples "the

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needs to punish the murderers, rapists, and torturers who sow such discord, violence, and horror. Yes, one can still hope that even these individuals who have wrecked so many lives may repent, but acknowledging them certainly complicates the universalist stance and the essence of our human autonomy. See my further discussion in Chapter Ten.

90. For a critique of liberation theology somewhat parallel to Adams's argument though from a liberation theologian, see Marcella Althaus-Reid, "From Liberation Theology to Indecent Theology", in *Liberation Theology: The Next Generation*, ed. Ivan Petralla (New York: Orbis, 2005), 20-38. Althaus-Reid argues that the original thrust of liberation theology did not address discrimination based on race, gender, or sexual orientation: "Liberation theology had built a concept of the poor within parameters taken totally from a strictly defined site of authority" (31).

91. Stephen Pope, "Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor", *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 242.

92. Leviticus 19:15; see also Ex. 23:3.

93. Eliezer Berkovits, "The Biblical Idea of Justice", in Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism,* ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2003), 133.

94. Plenty of biblical passages highlight the need to aid the poor and the oppressed: from Amos: "Listen to this, you who devour the needy, annihilating the poor of the land! … The Lord swears by the Pride of Jacob: I will never forget any of their doings" (8:4,7); Psalms: "Judge the wretched and the orphan, / vindicate the lowly and the poor, / rescue the wretched and the needy; / save them from the hand of the wicked" (82:3-4); or the letter of James: "Come now, you Rich … Behold the wages you withheld from the workers who harvested your fields are crying aloud, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts". At the very least, the Bible never advocates the opposite action, and Christ's response that in performing acts like clothing the naked and feeding the hungry, one clothes and feeds Him (Mt 25:31-46) should settle the matter for most Christians.

95. Citing Aloysius Pieris, Jon Sobrino writes: "Obviously there are different forms of poverty. In the Palestine of Jesus' time, for example, the poor could be described as follows: the socially excluded (lepers and mentally handicapped), the religiously marginalized (prostitutes and tax collectors), the culturally oppressed (women and children), the socially dependent

obstetrician who experiences each new birth as a precious gift from God, or an astrophysicist's (or microbiologist's) appreciation of the majesty of creation".[96] He still contends though that the preferential option for the poor is a valid theological concept. Stating the notion of "preference" in the context of God's love can still maintain God's love for everyone – but in our world – choices have to be made. A God who is on the side of justice and love will – again, broadly speaking – be on the side of the poor and oppressed. This is in part because such people are voiceless and powerless for basic human rights and are hindered from the potential to develop even basic capabilities. To try to poke holes in the argument by bringing up an example of a virtuous rich person versus a dishonest poor one is to miss the point.

While Adams is aware of the criticism that her focus may seem to diminish our accountability and purpose in this world, she also unduly censures liberation theologians for what she believes is an inordinate focus on liberation from material misery in this world. This position is linked with her tendency to minimise our responsibility for our moral choices, in part, to account for why universal salvation is a more just option for everyone.

A balance has to be struck here. Because of the extent and depravity of evil in this world and the limits of human justice, if suffering can be "overcome", the onus is mostly on God. Sadly, too much blood has been spilt; too many people have others' blood on their hands (remember one call kill with an immoral law or embargo as easily as a bomb or machete). Nevertheless, over-reliance upon God need not be a negative faith practice if it also incorporates human responsibility and human endeavours to end gratuitous suffering in this life. McCord Adams instead seems to rebuke liberation theology's over-emphasis on the goal to promote the kingdom of God here and now and to work for that justice because she seems to think their aims are constructed solely in the context of human intentions and effort.[97]

In this regard she is right to note our abysmal effort in making this world a utopia for all. But liberation theologians always see social justice through the biblical lens of the gospels: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and God's saving action in history, as depicted in *Exodus* and in other works from the Hebrew

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(widows and orphans), the physically handicapped (deaf and mute, crippled and blind), the psychologically tormented (spirit-possessed and epileptic), and the spiritually humble (simple, God-fearing people, repentant sinners" ["Depth and Urgency of the Option for the Poor" in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 22].

96. Pope, "Proper and Improper", 250.

97. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 198.

Scriptures. It is never purely a human affair. As Ignacio Ellacuría writes: "This march from oppression to promise is sustained on hope. It is received as grace (there would not seem to be many motives for hope, in view of the enormous problems and difficulties in taking hope as something natural), but it goes on being nourished historically and growing in the praxis of liberation".[98] Because McCord Adams links political and liberation thinkers, it is difficult to comprehend where she draws the line between these various groups. Catholic liberation theologians, like most Christians, are straddling both this world and the next, and asserting that the saving presence of God is endowed in both worlds. Nothing radical there. José Comblin writes: "God's grace enters human history.... [it] is the force that awakens, animates, and maintains the struggle of the oppressed, who are victims of injustice and evil".[99] There is no separation, no dichotomy between establishing the Kingdom of God on earth while also anticipating the transcendent redemption and flowering of that Kingdom at the final judgment.

As Nigel Biggar, in his "Showing the Gospel in Social Praxis", observes: "One can affirm a very intimate connection between spiritual and social salvation without abolishing the distinction".[100] He goes on to add, however, that

> We should certainly follow [the liberation theologians] in acknowledging that love of God or faith in him makes demands upon our economic relationships and structures, as upon our social and political ones. But the moment they imply that sin and salvation refer simply to secular relationships, we should part company.[101]

If one goes to a typical liberation theology text and excises words like 'Christ', 'resurrection', 'eschatological', and 'soteriological', one will see how much of that essay remains. As Biggar judiciously notes in that same essay: "Many liberation theologians for example, are theologically orthodox. They take for granted the classical Christological claims about Christ's divinity and therefore classical Trinitarian theology. They acknowledge that Christianity makes claims about God's redemptive activity as well as about right political behaviour".[102] Ignacio Ellacuría, for example, emphasises that removal of injustice in this world "continues the

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98. Ignacio Ellacuría, "Utopia and Prophecy in Latin America", in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1993), 304.

99. José Comblin, "Grace", trans. Dinah Livingstone, in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 530.

100. Nigel Biggar, "Showing the Gospel in Social Praxis", *Anvil: An Anglican Evangelical Journal for Theology and Mission*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1991): 11.

101. Ibid., 12.

102. Ibid., 10.

saving work of Jesus"[103] and prepares the way for the coming of God.[104] Again, rare indeed would be one of liberation theology's main proponents calling for justice without the concomitant plea for God's saving grace and intervention. As Biggar points out, the two paths are complementary, not contradictory.[105]

Contra Adams's interpretations, liberation theology is also not opposed to her focus on the individual.[106] Liberation theologians would applaud it, especially as she is referring to victims of oppression and violence who are often voiceless. Most liberation theologians are attacking systemic problems caused and perpetrated by individuals to individuals, and the focus on the suffering individual victims leads to a condemnation of the structures that promote that suffering. It is not a matter of either/or. As Peter Phan comments: "While not neglecting the personal dimension of sin, since [as Gutiérrez notes] 'behind an unjust structure there is a responsible individual or collective will, a will to reject God and others', liberation theology emphasizes what has been called social sin or structural sin".[107]

D. Theological Language Amidst Burning Children

In addition to misreading liberation theology, I need to clarify Adams's interpretation of Greenberg's "working principle". In Chapter One, I introduced the principle as a means to evaluate theodicies though I left the question open whether it is the best litmus test for all theodic statements or whether it needs to be clarified or altered in some way. In this section, using McCord Adams's critique, I will begin to chart my own stance on this principle and how it connects to my aims in this work.

One of McCord Adams's worthwhile goals is to "chart a *via media* that rejects any dichotomizing of philosophical reflections on horrors, on the one hand, and

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103. Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People", trans. Philip Berryman and Robert R. Barr, in *Mysterium Liberationis*, 580.

104. Peter C. Phan, "Prophecy and Contemplation: The Language of Liberation Theology Against Evil", in *Evil and the Response of World Religions*, ed. William Cenkner (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1997), 187.

105. See also Javier Jiménez Limón, "Suffering, Death, Cross, and Martyrdom", trans. Dinah Livingstone, in *Mysterium Liberationis*. He writes: "Transforming solidarity with the suffering of victims of socio-historical oppression . . .is the decisive place for the humanizing experience and practice of the redemption of all suffering for its faithful and credible proclamation" (708).

106. In *Christ and Horrors* McCord Adams writes: "By contrast with neo-orthodoxy, twentieth-century political and liberation theologies returned to the sin problem. Their concentration on the systemic non-optimalities of political injustice and oppression led them to refocus on a very much *as-yet-un*realised eschatology. Their Marxian philosophical underpinnings spawned a stridently collective focus, which often dismissed concerns for individual salvation (much less bodily resurrection) in pejorative terms" (206). A better understanding of the option for the poor would prevent such a misunderstanding.

107. Phan, "Prophecy and Contemplation", 186.

praxis that copes with them, on the other".[108] She rightly questions whether the theoretical and practical approaches conflict or are separate. While there may be disagreement on whether theory or praxis is more important, they should have a symbiotic relationship. Stephen Pope, for example, writes: "Concrete actions in the cause of justice for the poor are ultimately more important than theories about those actions, but the former nonetheless require interpretation and moral language for deciphering their theological supports, conceptual meaning, and socio-ethical implications".[109] Without this probing for moral language, the meaning and efficacy of a moral act could be diminished. The theory ideally should nourish, challenge, and inspire such praxis; and where action is wanting or misapplied, theoretical language can be a means to redirect and channel one's energies to a more effective and moral end.

Advocating the role that theoretical and philosophical theology can play, therefore, particularly for horror participants, McCord Adams argues that "many (though, to be sure not all) participants in horrors, sooner or later, not at every stage but eventually, over and over, raise questions of meaning: of why God allowed it, whether and how God could redeem it, etc".[110] The tentativeness and disclaimers of the sentence are duly noted, as they should be. McCord Adams then boldly challenges Irving Greenberg's principle, writing:

> Put otherwise more bluntly, it remains appropriate for philosophers to say things it would be inappropriate to voice in the presence of the burning children because participants in horrors are themselves not always in the presence of burning children. Survivors have to deal with their experiences afterward.[111]

This claim rests upon the notion that the actual moment of extreme suffering differs from what follows. It agrees with Greenberg's contention that one must reach into the pit while children are actually burning, but argues that at some point following the dreadful event, some truths not appropriate then, need to be said after.

In Chapter One we saw how traumatic memories can make the victim relive the trauma that remains with them forever. To quote Jean Améry again: "Twenty-two years later I am still dangling over the ground by dislocated arms, panting, and accusing myself".[112] For many victims, the issue of time is not relevant.

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108. McCord Adams, *Horrendous,* 186.
109. Pope, "Proper and Improper", 271.
110. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 188.
111. Ibid., 188.
112. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its*

In fact, Greenberg's point is that because we are more aware of these atrocities, saying anything becomes circumspect from now on. The memories or the witnesses or the deceased of these ordeals – will not let us do otherwise. Thus, we are always in the presence of burning children. As we speak, somebody, somewhere, is being tortured and mutilated, or suffering in agonising pain. With the proliferation of mass media and the instantaneous transmission of news, one can be in the presence of a suffering human being through access to television or the internet. When in the physical presence of such a victim (and, of course, distinctions like a victim's age, religion, and rational capacity are key factors), the paramount issue is that a victim may not want to hear these theodic arguments because the pain is too acute, and this could be during the ordeal or decades after. It should also be remembered that some individuals have engaged in theodicy amidst affliction and suffering, as Donat's quotation argues above, though he, unlike some rabbis, lost faith.[113] As a rabbi and author, Greenberg does not advocate total silence, but is urging that we take great care with what we say because of these horrendous truths. In his essay "New Revelations and New Patterns", he writes: The Talmud tells that, after the destruction, God's might is shown in divine restraint from violating human freedom by intervening and preventing the evil, but divine awesomeness is shown in that the people of God still exist. This revelation summons humankind to secularity, to create and rehabilitate the divine image in a human community. This is the ultimate testimony – perhaps the only credible one – that can speak of God in a world of burning children. And it summons humans to co-responsibility with God, that that fragile redemption be preserved and nourished.[114]

Thus, any act that seeks to mend the world can be a sign of that testimony. As a believer in God and a man of faith, Greenberg also knows there is a value and purpose to theoretical language.[115] Depending on context, one cannot necessarily say what was inappropriate during someone's ordeal as opposed to after it.[116]

In Adams's context, someone is coming to her for help. The victim has given the listener a certain level of freedom and trust to speak openly, but awareness of the evil necessarily influences and hampers what can be said in a pastoral sense. Many statements necessarily reflect on that traumatic moment. One's choice of words

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Realities, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 36.

113. The struggles of the young protagonist in Elie Wiesel's *Night* reflect some of these concerns. For this discussion, along with more analysis of Greenberg, see Chapter Ten.

114. Irving Greenberg, "New Revelations and New Patterns", in Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 137.

matters, though such care does not mean one cannot draw on one's so-called "comprehensive doctrine". At issue is maintaining one's integrity while showing proper respect and deference to the suffering other.

Finally, one needs to recall that McCord Adams often writes from a pastoral perspective based on her personal life. Her *Wrestling for Blessing* contains her sermons to members of her congregation who were often in great pain and misery from dying of AIDS, or who were sexually abused, or suffering other horrific ills.[117] This praxis is certainly praiseworthy, but such pastoral sensitivity, unfortunately, is not fully reflected in her challenge of Greenberg's "working principle".

E. On God-tantrums

Another problematic component is McCord Adams's stress on a passible God. She states: "God the Son suffers in *both* natures – in the Divine nature (not only feeling our feelings but also 'God-sized' distress) … and in the human nature (participation in horrors within the framework of a finite consciousness)".[118] Basing her view predominantly on the Bible, she claims that "God could feel torn with anger and grief" or "exasperated"[119] while remaining stable compared to the frenetic alterations of our emotional frame of mind. This suffering and emotive God, then, never stoops to our level because God is "too vast and stable", but God's acute identification with our affliction puts God in a better position to redeem all horror participants.

It is a valid aim, but not ultimately convincing. While the utterly apathetic human person does not express the rich depth of humanity, a lack of stability and equanimity can influence our actions to be unjust or improper. Think of rage for example. Aristotle writes: "Now *hot-tempered* people get angry quickly and with the wrong persons and at the wrong things and more than is right, but their anger ceases quickly – which is the best point about them".[120] Unless, of course, such a hot-

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115. Irving Greenberg, "Covenantal Partners in a Postmodern World", in *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth,* 86. In the passage I am referring to, Greenberg is writing about how religions have gone back to their original classic texts for reinterpretation and renewal.

116. As a student in Elie Wiesel's class some fifty-years after the Holocaust, I would never voice any Christological statement deemed potentially inappropriate to him, like emphasising how Christ had been there to comfort him at Auschwitz.

117. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Wrestling for Blessing* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 2005), 8.

118. McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 174.

119. Ibid., 173.

120. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 390.

tempered 'fellow' is God, as the 'literary'[121] character of some of the stories in the Bible reveals (Gen 6:5-7, Ex 4:14, Ex. 4:24-6, Ex. 33, etc.).

In an analysis of God's anger, particularly in the Hebrew Bible, Thomas Weinandy shows that for Novatian, "God's anger is not an indication of God's mutability or passibility, but an expression of his immutable perfection and passionate goodness".[122] Maimonides makes a similar claim in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, arguing that emotions attributed to God like "jealousy, desire for retribution, revenge, or anger...are in accordance with the guilt of those who are to be punished, and not the result of any emotion; for He is above all defect".[123] Contra Adams, a passible God may be emotionally appealing but is not therefore in a better position to redeem humanity. Weinandy continues: "if the whole ontological system, which includes God, is impaired by evil, then there is no one, including God, who can repair it and make it right. . . The consequences of a suffering God are dire indeed".[124]

I agree with Weinandy that an impassible God is in a better position to guarantee truth, justice, and goodness to everyone: "Since God does not suffer, he becomes absolutely free in its expression and supremely pure in its purpose. If God did suffer, it would mean that God would need not only to alleviate the suffering of others, but also his own suffering, and thus there would be an in-built self-interest in God's love and consolation".[125] To stress "God's compassion and mercy is seen most fully in its effect"[126] is to remember the promises revealed through a religion in which God champions the rights of the poor and the oppressed. Such a loving, merciful God is also a God of justice and therefore those who have murdered and raped and mutilated and refuse to turn to God in repentance will reap what they sow.

Part of the current sympathy with arguing for a passible God is based both on a misunderstanding of the tradition and awareness of the magnitude of evil in our world. Weinandy critiques the common mistake made by advocates of God's

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121. Harold Bloom writes: "Mischievous, inquisitive, jealous, and turbulent, Yahweh is as personal as a God can be" [*Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 138]. Also see Novatian above for an example of a patristic theologian not reading such passages literally.

122. Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 106.

123. Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed,* trans. M. Friedländer (New York: Dover, 1956), 76. Interestingly, against McCord Adams's use of God's imagination, Maimonides claims that because of a defect in imagination, which is subject to change, "Imagination (*ra'ayon*), therefore, was never employed as a figure in speaking of God, while thought and reason are figuratively ascribed to Him" (64).

124. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 157.

125. Ibid., 160.

126. Ibid., 229.

passibility who

> [C]onsistently argue that for God to be impassible means that he is unloving. This is not so. They forget that to say that God is impassible does not tell us something positive about God – that he is inert, static, and lifeless and so not loving, kind, and compassionate. Rather, to say that God is impassible… is to deny of God all those characteristics and properties of the created order which render him less than perfectly good, loving, and merciful.[127]

I support McCord Adams's aim to present a God worthy of belief and capable of healing the many wounds of this world. We just do not need a passible God to do that.

V. Conclusion

Recall Helen Bamber's concerns for how to treat people who have been tortured. McCord Adams's focus on horrendous evils while seeking a way for God to redeem all horror participants is noteworthy and commendable and could be a great hope for many sufferers. However, use of testimonies of mass atrocity would have clarified some of the above problematic assertions and aided her aim. So, too, would a starting point that accentuates the goodness of humanity, as Pollefeyt aptly argues.

Nevertheless, if one acknowledges the God of creation and accentuates the beauty, creativity, and diversity of life and a God of superlative imagination, as McCord maintains, then belief in life-after-death, which is dependent on that God of creation, does not seem as impossible or absurd as Phillips implies.[128]

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127. Ibid., 94.

128. In Chapter Ten, I will return to this issue and examine relevant issues of memory, identity, and healing in the context of the post-mortem encounter with God while evaluating whether universalism, which McCord advocates, aids or hinders a reflection on evil in the context of mass atrocity.

Assessment of Section One

Before turning to liberation theology texts, I want to highlight features in Section One that would be useful in developing a viable theodicy.

Though needing further refinements, Phillips's advocacy of a disinterested faith rightly touches upon a useful framework to view suffering in this world. However, from his analysis, I do not see the tenability of theism without theodicy or a theism that denies the afterlife or dismantles traditional conceptions of God. Theism needs theodicy and a theodicy needs an eschatological context.

John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris* points to the possibility for meaning and healing of one's suffering through participation in the redemptive work of Christ and committing oneself to follow in His footsteps. While I remain sceptical that such a potentially empowering message is open to all types of suffering, the message brims with so much hope and optimism that it re-opens the possibility to speak of a meaningful agency for individuals (especially those in mass atrocity) who are often restricted and limited by their "victimhood".

McCord Adams's work is particularly helpful for her focus on the impact of horrific evils on the victims and perpetrators of horrendous suffering. While I was not convinced of the value of a return to aesthetics or a movement away from moral categories when examining a theodicy, her work is also valuable for accentuating that if a theodicy fails one person, it fails everyone.

It is surprising therefore that McCord Adams distances herself from liberation theology. Such a theology's emphasis on the voiceless and the underprivileged demands that a theodicy focuses on the most vulnerable so that all will be accounted for. Just as I turn to witnesses to mass atrocity to ensure their voice and arguments are heard and reflected upon, liberation theologians do their theology from the underside of history, which necessarily colours and defines their theological concepts in a similar fashion. I will examine this key element more fully in the next two chapters.

SECTION TWO

LIBERATION THEOLOGY: DOING THEOLOGY "WHILE AYACUCHO LASTS"[1]

> In Scripture, the oppression of the poor in everyday life appears much more often than their repression in massacres. For that reason we shall refer more to everyday oppression.[2]

INTRODUCTION

The next two chapters will analyse theodic texts from the Catholic Latin American liberation theologians Jon Sobrino and Gustavo Gutiérrez. With their focus on the preferential option for the poor, praxis, and structural injustice, I will argue that liberation theology provides crucial theological tools and vocabulary for the Christian theodicist. While these texts will address issues of mass atrocity, their main focus, as the epigraph above acknowledges, is the mass exploitation and oppression of the poor on a daily basis. At the least, mass poverty and oppression are truths which certainly undermine arguments about the beauty and goodness of this world and so raise questions about the active role or presence of God in this world. One issue, then, is whether focusing on mass atrocity excludes or addresses such types of suffering or poverty. And more importantly, how does one talk about a loving God in the midst of such suffering and mass death?

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1. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis, 2002), 102.

2. Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (New York: Orbis, 2004), 80, n. 11.

CHAPTER SIX

SOBRINO'S PRAXIC THEODICY

> By 2010 life expectancy in Botswana is expected to fall to twenty-seven years; half of all children in the country are likely to be AIDS orphans.[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on Jon Sobrino's *Where is God? Earthquakes, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope* for his assessment of the value of theodicy from the vantage point of the poor and oppressed. This aim is akin to my own use of testimonies of mass atrocity to gauge a theodicy's relevance to such victims. This chapter will be divided into two main headings: the first will highlight key features of his text that are most helpful for my purposes while the second part will examine his evaluation of theodicy in the context of the poor and the oppressed of Latin America.

II. KEY FEATURES OF THE TEXT

A. (UN)NATURAL EVIL

In *Where is God?*, Sobrino grapples with natural and moral evil. While my investigation is focused on mass atrocity, Sobrino usefully argues why instances of so-called natural evil often entail acts of moral evil. For example, he highlights humanity refusing to share resources and technology which make the poor more likely to die in certain catastrophes. One could also add the prohibitive cost of vaccinations to third-world countries. Thus, human negligence or greed often results in mass death. In El Salvador, a confluence of acts of moral evil coupled by natural disasters have led to horrific suffering. Its victims, Sobrino writes, "are not only excluded but non-existent".[2] They are voiceless. Sobrino notes how to live in El Salvador

> is a heavy burden, but it is not borne equally by everyone. As always, it weighs more heavily on the poor majorities: The earthquake has destroyed houses, especially the ones built of mud and sticks or of adobe, there is where the poor live because they can't afford cement and iron. . . The earthquake is not just a tragedy, it is an X-ray of the country: it is mostly

1. Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 682.

> the poor who get killed, the poor who are buried, the poor who have to run out with the four things they have left…[and] who face enormous obstacles in trying to rebuild their lives, the poor who cannot get financial credit.[3]

In a natural disaster, economic disparity is almost always exposed. The wealthy have insurance or live on higher ground or have buildings of more durable quality. The poor often do not. Such a reality, which still does not exculpate God as the creator of such a world, underlies how humanity is complicit in perpetrating and exacerbating events that cause horrendous suffering and untold deaths.

B. Theodicy and Anthropodicy

To face these evils openly and honestly, Sobrino, as fellow Jesuit Georges de Schrijver writes: "refuses to separate the question of the justification of God (theodicy) from that of the justification of the human being (anthropodicy)".[4] This union of anthropodicy and theodicy maintains a layered perspective on the reality of evil that does not exculpate either God or humanity because of the world's horrors. The important issue, Sobrino argues, is to see that:

> The challenge to God, and to human beings, is where were they *both* in Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the Gulag…? Where are they today in the African Great Lakes, Haiti, Bangladesh, countries that live, as we do, side by side with the scandalous profligacy of the North?[5]

Sobrino, therefore, contends that if one cites the appearance of evil to prove God does not exist, then any attempt at anthropodicy will also fail because "fifty million human beings die every year from hunger or hunger-related illnesses" and yet despite the resources, we do not halt this travesty. Therefore, "just as one says God doesn't exist, so too does humanity not exist; what exists is inhumanity. Fifty million human beings do not just die; they are killed. By the critical logic of theodicy, it may be that the 'human species' exists – but not 'humanity', not the 'human family'".[6]

Before we blame God, we need to take a longer look at our own actions and negligence. Nor should such suffering be blamed on fate, circumstance, or simply deemed a 'tragedy' when the cause is human greed and carelessness. While my

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2. Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (New York: Orbis, 2004), xxxiii.

3. Ibid., 3.

4. Georges de Schrijver, S.J., *Recent Theological Debates in Europe: Their Impact on Interreligious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004), 285.

5. Sobrino, *Where is God?*, 27.

6. Ibid., 26.

work includes testimony from the Holocaust, Rwandan genocide, Russian, Chinese, and North Korean gulags, Tibetan genocide, and the Argentinean Dirty War – among other historical atrocities – it is also relevant that Sobrino includes the devastating suffering that is present through both war and horrific poverty in the African Great Lakes, Haiti, and Bangladesh. His focus, as noted in the introduction to Section Two, is the poor of Latin America. In Chapter One, I quoted the OED's definition of 'atrocity': "1. savage enormity; horrible or heinous wickedness. . . 3. an atrocious deed, an act of extreme cruelty and heinousness". Sobrino and other liberation theologians argue that the suffering of millions in this world is perpetrated by systemic structures that are planned, developed, and supported by individuals in various governments and companies along with a majority of those in the "first-world" or "North" who are often complicit in allowing such conditions or who benefit from them without reflection. Just as Partnoy opened her testimony with the Argentinean government's denial of torture centres, a similar denial or equivocation of words may follow those trying to claim that the deaths of millions of children in the two-thirds world from malnutrition or preventable disease cannot be considered "an act of extreme cruelty and heinousness". If such suffering does not fit such descriptions, how do we describe the magnitude of so many premature deaths (see this chapter's epigraph)? In fact, because a theodicy seeks to uphold the beauty and value of creation and a healing and redemptive God of love and justice, Sobrino's text is invaluable for ensuring that such extensive suffering is included in any theodic discussion that also examines horrors like the Holocaust or Rwandan genocide.

C. Primordial Holiness

In Chapter Two, we heard victims allege God was absent while others maintained God's presence. Sobrino finds that "Even in the midst of catastrophe and daily hardship, the poor and the victims – especially the women, and their children – put into practice and fulfill with distinction God's call to life, and to give life to others".[7] Such a practice he deems "primordial holiness". While such suffering is normally evidence against theodicy, Sobrino states that these struggles point to why one can begin to answer the question of how God is present in the midst of tragedy.[8]

Crucial to such an assertion is the option for the poor. As he writes: "...Social reality [especially in Western democracies] is seen more through the eyes of the

7. Ibid., 73.

citizen than the poor. In contrast, the Christian biblical tradition, especially as it has been recovered in our days in the Third World, gives ultimacy to *primary life*, because it gives ultimacy to *the poor*. And this ultimacy of the poor appears in God's *partiality* toward them: there is a correlation between the primary life of the poor and God's partiality to them".[9] Thus, because God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed, the poor often reveal the presence of God working within them, even if only in their responding to the call to live and to aid others to live. At the same time, "With respect to us", as Sobrino writes, including himself as one of the non-poor, "[the poor] maintain the specific 'alterity' of the divine and thus, simultaneously and paradoxically, they make the divine 'present' in the world".[10]

As I interpret Sobrino regarding the alterity of the poor, one can imagine the sight of the woman with the hemorrhage or the possessed man who calls himself 'Legion' in the gospels. Society labeled both of them as outcasts and unclean. Yet, Christ answered the call of the suffering, destitute woman to be healed and called the other to discipleship. In their own way, both individuals reflected the presence of God which Christ was able to manifest for others to see. It points to how we are all made in the image and likeness of God. For Sobrino, God is particularly present in the plight of the poor and oppressed and is reflected in their acts of love and kindness, or mere striving to survive in the midst of such death and misery. While one rarely seeks to imitate such lives, they "inspire humanizing feelings of veneration, wherever there are people of good heart".[11] They are "sacraments", and thus signs of God's presence. In the essay: "Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus", Sobrino provocatively writes:

> From the theological dynamic of 'from among the poor,' there developed also a rethinking of the locus from which salvation comes. In this way we arrived at the formula (*extra pauperes* nulla salus (outside the poor there is no salvation).[12]

I have already advocated my support of the preferential option (though siding with Stephen Pope's clarifications) and I am willing to support the formula above, especially if by 'the poor' we mean all those who are oppressed and marginalised or lacking basic human needs. To perpetrate injustice against the poor and

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8. Ibid., 150. Sobrino is contrasting 'how' and 'where' here.
9. Ibid., 81.
10. Ibid., 73-4.
11. Ibid., 73.
12. Jon Sobrino, "Extra Pauperes Nulla Salus" in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 71.

marginalised, whether through intent or indifference, is antithetical to seeking to spread the Reign of God on earth. Such a formula, at the least, is more concrete and inclusive than the outdated one which claimed there was no salvation outside the church. Nevertheless, I still have some key questions with Sobrino's interpretations here: How, in fact, is God's presence made manifest in the dying poor, especially those who do not die comforted and in peace or who commit injustice? What can be revealed of God with the deaths of millions of children from disease and starvation? Furthermore, Christians (especially those partial to liberation theology) turn to the Bible and especially the witness of Christ as their 'evidence' for the preferential option, which then acts as the underlying grounds for the interpretation that God's presence is in the midst of the poor and the afflicted. Such an interpretation means that the poor in particular call us to a life of holiness and healing. Their plight is a tragedy and a scandal. And yet, as Sobrino writes: "The answer of Christian faith is that in tragedies, God is on the cross, giving hope".[13] This hope is manifested in belief in the resurrection and in Christ's sanctifying a path devoted to establishing the reign of God on earth and so calling all of us to discipleship. Non-believers, however, would dismiss the Bible as evidence and look to the suffering of our world where so many die anonymously and shamefully (such anonymity is also a focus of Sobrino) as further 'evidence' that God is not present in the world. If one rejects the reading or the 'truth' of these Biblical (or gospel) stories, is there still reason to agree with Sobrino or are there valid reasons to reject the option for the poor?

Turning to the poor, Sobrino believes that seeing them under the rubric of primordial holiness or saintliness will lead us to see goodness and God's presence where we often only see misery while challenging us to examine and change our lives for the benefit of those others in need: He writes:

> We know how to relate to canonized saints, but not to primordial saintliness. . . It would be ironic if we focused on the exceptional saints and ignored the victimized majorities, because what the saints ask of us is precisely to stand at the cross with the victims; to feel deep respect for their mystery, which both hides and reveals the mystery of God; to let ourselves be graced, forgiven, saved by them. And that we pour out our very lives to bring them down from the cross.[14]

Such hope for Sobrino is present through the crucifixion and the resurrection, as both events testify to God's great love, a love that gives hope for "the possibility of

13. Sobrino, *Where is God?*, 150.

resurgent life" in the midst of atrocity and horrendous suffering and hope for life beyond death.[15] Such a solidarity presages that horror, suffering, and death will not have the ultimate word. As echoed by John Paul II and McCord Adams, Sobrino writes: "God shows his love by being close to the victims, being in solidarity with them, completely and forever".[16]

Sobrino's description of the lives of victims of poverty and oppression as "primordial holiness" or "saintliness" certainly renders as holy and meaningful what only seems to be loss and victimisation. As he adds: "the option for the poor,' though costly, should not only be seen as implying suffering and risks, including martyrdom; it also gives meaning and joy to our existence. In recent decades I have personally been able to live in a Church that made a very profound option for the poor, and I have never seen so much joy in a church".[17] It is also important to keep in mind that contrary to Adams's assertion that liberation theologians "romanticize the poor",[18] Sobrino clarifies that "These poor people and victims may well be 'holy sinners', in the conventional understanding of holiness and sin. The poor are also sometimes overcome by the mystery of iniquity; sometimes it leaves them without words".[19] He then cites the example of child soldiers in the Congo. Aware of the causes that led some of these children to commit atrocities, he turns to a speech from Bishop Melchisedek Sikuli, bishop of the Democratic Republic of Congo, who quotes from Ahmadou Kouroma's book: *Allah is Not Obliged*:

> When you have no one in the world, no father, no mother, no sister, and you are still a child in a ruined and barbarous country where everyone is killing everyone else, what do you do? You become a child-soldier in order to eat and kill; that is all we can do.[20]

Sobrino responds: "no concept can express the reality of these child-soldiers, these poor people and victims". The causes must be condemned, but he includes these

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14. Ibid., 80.

15. Ibid., 150. See also his "Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God", in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis, 1993), 440-461.

16. Sobrino, *Where is God?*, 145.

17. Jon Sobrino, "Depth and Urgency of the Option for the Poor," in *No Salvation Outside The Poor:Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 19-20.

18. As Gutiérrez writes: "God has a preferential option for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or religiously, but simply because they are poor and living in an inhuman situation that is contrary to God's will. The ultimate basis for the privileged position of the poor is not the poor in themselves but in God, in the gratuitousness and universality of God's *agapeic* love" [*On Job, God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis, 2002), 94].

19. Sobrino, *Where is God?,* 74.

20. Ibid., 75.

children under the rubric of primordial holiness "from the standpoint of a world indifferent to, and co-responsible for, such a tragedy".[21] He is urging the world, complicit in its indifference to their plight, to see these children as they are: scarred, broken, and corrupted, but still children who are loved by God and are in desperate need of conversion. He makes these hopeful claims about these victims while excoriating the complicit world because "Christ proclaim[ed] and inaugurat[ed] the Reign of God in behalf of the poor and outcast".[22] Such statements, as exemplified in the option for the poor and in Christ's solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, highlight how God is present in those who seek to spread the Reign of God in our midst and amidst tragedy.

D. Primal Solidarity

For Sobrino, as with Greenberg in his working principle, how one tries to heal those who are suffering and how one works to prevent the reoccurrence of such suffering are the dominant aims. In addition to his term "primordial holiness", Sobrino speaks of a "primal solidarity" among the poor, who do not expect sufficient outside help and so band together to restore, heal, and save what they can: "Not many power shovels were available to dig up the bodies… So long lines of men, passing buckets back and forth, tackled the job of removing thousands of cubic meters of earth".[23] This primal solidarity also has resonance with John Paul II's remarks in Chapter Four.

While the poor respond with primal solidarity, Sobrino advocates that outsiders in the first world should "let ourselves be affected by this tragedy, not to turn away or soften it". He believes this is not a type of masochism but an "initial moment of honesty toward reality".[24] To be open to this initial moment, however, is not a guaranteed state. In order to see, one has to know what to look for and be open to what one sees, which is why for Sobrino "there is also a salvific aspect to truly letting ourselves be affected by tragedy".[25] Sobrino's use of the term "salvific" in this context is particularly apt as it reveals a person now oriented to see reality while acknowledging the struggles one must face. Such a reality is not exempt from theological questioning.

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21. Ibid., 75.
22. Sobrino, "Systematic Christology", 453.
23. Sobrino, *Where is God?,* 6.
24. Ibid., 7.
25. Ibid., 7.

E. Theological Protest

While the presence of God for Sobrino is seen in the lives of the struggling poor and in individuals like Oscar Romero, he writes that faith in God

> …does not exempt us from honestly questioning and/or challenging God. In a time of natural or historic catastrophes, believers too have to wrestle with the God they believe in, who apparently cannot or will not prevent the catastrophes.[26]

Note the balance trying to be struck here, not only between theodicy and antitheodicy but in the role of questioning and faith. As will be seen with my discussion of many Jewish theologians and medieval rabbis in Chapters Eight and Nine, theological protest and questioning can play an essential role in one's candid and authentic faith position and probing. While voices rejecting theological protest are prominent in Christian tradition,[27] Sobrino advocates such protest because it flows from "ultimate respect and unconditional love for the poor and the victims". It demands to know why such a life valued and loved by God has been suddenly cut off and forgotten. Such protest is especially linked with the need for justice, as Sobrino contends: "Of course we should protest, hold someone accountable, refuse to be duped, keep our guard up… To stop protesting would mean burying the victims forever".[28]

Uniting theodicy and anthropodicy is an important means to verify that the right questions are addressed at the right time to the deserving party. It maintains responsibility for human acts and the role of individual willing and choice while also acknowledging the role God plays as the ultimate creator.

F. Theological Memory

While theological protest is one response to suffering in our world, how and what one remembers (or forgets) plays a key role in forming a picture of our world and determining where injustice thrives. Just as the victors often write history, Sobrino argues that the powerful control and manipulate the tools and mechanisms of communal and 'authorised' memory. Devastations that happen in less powerful

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26. Ibid., 26.

27. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson, ed. David Knowles (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), 477. Bruce Barber writes: "In this modern paradigm, evil is assumed to be a 'problem', such that we must ask God to justify himself/itself to us. In light of the cross of Christ, this question must *always* be regarded as a blasphemous question" ["Afterword: Theodicy, Eschatology, and Postmodernity", in *Theodicy and Eschatology*, eds. Bruce Barber and David Neville (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 203].

28. Sobrino, *Where is God?*, 144.

countries or to marginalised people are often 'forgotten' or not told. Sobrino, therefore, calls for a more active and theological memory to ensure the suffering of the marginalised are retold and responded to. He asks "Who still remembers such tragedies as the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with two million dead in two years, or the floods in Mozambique in 2001, or the droughts that began in August 2001 in several Central American countries?"[29] While forgetting such travesties seems to make defending a theodicy easier, remembering them complicates but also purifies the task, as a theodicy strives for more transparency, honesty, and humility. For Sobrino, such questions ensure that one's theological language and arguments are not removed from the realities of this world.

The question remains, however, whether this now clear and honest viewing of reality still allows for the possibility of a viable theodicy.

III. Evaluating Theodicy

A. Theodicy Amidst Suffering

How the poor and oppressed view their suffering is of fundamental importance to my aims and a concern of Sobrino's as well. He states that few people among the poor raised doubts of God's love and justice after the earthquake, but instead raised fears that it was a punishment, or rejoiced because they survived. In either of these options though, God is not challenged with questions or severe doubts.[30] In this vein, he rarely hears the poor in El Salvador during the earthquake render the question of suffering in the traditional language of the theodicist[31] – asking how a good God could allow this to happen to them.

While he emphasises what he will call "theodic-praxis", Sobrino does remark: "We should say, at least in a footnote, that the religiosity of the simple people can perhaps benefit from a small dose of theodicy in order to avoid trivializing the reality of God, making that reality ahistorical, unverifiable from any viewpoint".[32] The language here is certainly measured though he goes on to add that "what we call popular piety has nothing to lose by asking seriously about God in the earthquake; indeed it will gain if it at least stops its present slide toward infantilizing religiosity … and can help recover the old sense of 'popular conscientization', at least under

29. Ibid., xxiii.
30. Ibid., xxxviii.
31. Sobrino does note that the question of doubt did arise during El Salvador's Civil War (ibid., 140).
32. Ibid., 26, no. 17.

the rubric of anthropodicy".[33] While such a quote opposes those who dismiss all theodicy with an acerbic comment, theodicy's seeming absence and lack of deep relevance here is noteworthy. Theodicy is thus implied as ineffectual or irrelevant to meeting the spiritual and theological needs of the poor and oppressed. He does not invalidate all of its potential worth, however. In the suffering present on the cross, the poor and oppressed can see that in Jesus of Nazareth the love of God reaches its apex in the Incarnation when God entered into history on the side of the oppressed, living in solidarity with all those seeking to walk in God's ways. Such a choice, sadly, entails suffering because

> in history there is no such thing as love without solidarity and there is no solidarity without incarnation. Solidarity that was not prepared to share the lot of those with whom it wanted to show solidarity would be paternalism, to put it mildly, or would lead to despotism.[34]

Similar to John Paul's analysis, such a solidarity also provides the context for suffering to be meaningful and shows why any theodicy must acknowledge that striving to follow Christ may entail suffering. As noted in Chapter Four, such an emphasis could be comforting for the Benjas[35] of the world, even while unjustly dunked upside down into the well, but not for suffering that is random and inexplicable and cannot be linked with any greater meaning or purpose. I return, then, to the limits of solidarity and the question of what value divine suffering confers to a victim who is not healed or redeemed in this world.

To answer this theological impasse, Sobrino turns to the poor, who want a God who can redeem and save. He writes: "In technical terms, the poor of this world want God to have *alterity,* otherness. . . But that is not all. . . They [also] turn to God when they find him close to their own suffering".[36] Here God is personal and relational, while remaining beyond our conception and imagination. Because God freely chose to take on human flesh and be exposed to the evil and suffering of this world through a lived solidarity with victims of injustice and persecution, such a love becomes both effective and credible. It is a spur and a means to hope and pray that healing is possible, especially for the victims and powerless of this life. This hope culminates with belief in Christ's resurrection and in the promise of an afterlife. Here the language of the beatitudes paints the scene: those who weep now,

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33. Ibid., 27.

34. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View,* trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (New York: Orbis, 1999), 245.

35. See Chapter Two.

36. Sobrino, *Where is God?*, 146-7.

will be consoled; the poor will inherit the earth. Hope and justice are alive and dynamic.[37]

B. Option for Reality

This hope and utopian vision[38] strives to confront and end injustice. Likewise, the earthquake and all the uncomfortable faith-questions it raises must be faced by Christians. Sobrino writes that one cannot "simply invoke God, as if faith and reflection were immune to the helplessness of the human condition in a catastrophe. That would be cheap faith, like the cheap grace that Bonhoeffer denounced. Christian faith does not allow us to trivialize the victims' suffering, even by invoking God". Thus, he writes that the God we see in the earthquake does nothing to eliminate the negativity of natural reality. Christian faith does not magically cause the problematic truth of the earthquake, or the problematic truth of God, to disappear. At first, rather, it can lead to confusion, questioning, and even protest. In short, the Christian faith "doesn't make things easy for God (the perennial problem of theodicy)".[39] This faith instead leads a believer to look to God without receiving any logically satisfactory response – or any response at all: "But in a mysterious way, that same God is bearing the burden of the earthquake. The earthquake expresses the reality of God, no longer as power but – scandalously – as solidarity, love and hope".[40]

While Sobrino has linked the presence of God in part with the mystery of the primordial holiness of the poor and oppressed, one problem is whether a God of creation (and so a God who "create[s] an earth whose tectonic plates shift so destructively?"[41]) can now be present as solidarity, hope, and love amidst the suffering caused from the earthquake. Sobrino rightly posits this occurrence as a "mystery", as many individuals assert that they were able to endure because of the presence of God. In the contexts of grappling with suffering from a devastating earthquake, a Christian usually identifies where humanity is at fault, raises questions to God about why this world contains earthquakes, and then stresses that God remains present in hope and solidarity, though such a paradox is a "mystery". The

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37. Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator*, 244.

38. In "Reflections Before Aparecida", Sobrino writes: "According to Latin American tradition, the poor are those who die before their time. For that reason we insist upon seeking the *eu-topia* – the place of the good – and we insist also that it not be *ou-topia*, a non-existent place, but *topia*, that which must have a place" (81).

39. Sobrino, *Where is God?,* 24.

40. Ibid., 25. Note the affinity here with Philips.

41. Ibid., 27.

gaps though remain intellectually and spiritually unsatisfying.

Sobrino is aware of the paradox and the gaps touched on above. Shrewdly, he argues that looking at the problem of evil in this way serves a purpose. His dominant message is that solidarity with the poor and the oppressed is at the root and core of the Christian faith embodied in Christ's witness to the downtrodden and marginalised in the Bible. Ironically, therefore, such a faith "does a great service to our world by not minimising the problem of God. The benefit is that the victim can and must demand an accounting. And those responsible – whoever they are – must render accounts".[42] In other words, the gaps that remain are not hidden, demanding a meaningful response, though this 'accounting' may very likely lead to pronouncing the limitations, if not the failure, of theoretical theodicy.

C. The Failure of Theodicy

In one moving section of the work, Sobrino includes the thought of a European priest in El Salvador who was amazed at how the people could sustain their faith despite tragedy during the Civil War. They told him: "God is acting, father. . . God is with us, father, because if not it would have been even worse". But then, the Massacre at El Mozote occurred. The priest could not believe that such an injustice, such evil, could have occurred:

> 'More than a thousand peasants murdered. I'm not exaggerating. I saw many of the bodies mutilated, falling apart…When I looked at the pile of bodies, the destruction, I couldn't bear it. How could it be that here of all places, where I have come so many times to say that God is close to us and loves us, that God is not indifferent to sorrow, how could such a dreadful massacre happen precisely here?'

Sobrino adds that the "peasants" were repeating the same question: "How many times have we said that God acts in our history? But father, if he does act, when will this end? Why so many years of war and so many thousands dead? What's wrong with God?"[43]

There are many haunting quotes in relation to suffering and evil and geographic location should play no emotional role in accentuating the travesty, but for a massacre to happen among the poor and oppressed where the priest proclaims how God loves them and cares for them – "how could such a dreadful massacre happen precisely here?" – seems to render all prayers, all hope and belief in God to be

42. Ibid., 25.

ultimately worthless. While Augustine felt he could boast of God's providence because Christians were mostly protected in churches during the sack of Rome,[44] we know that Tutsis huddled in chapels or churches were easy prey for the killers, "swinging their blades". Florence, a survivor of such an attack, remarks: "We had no weapons, no way to defend ourselves....There was some screaming and begging, but most of us just sat there waiting for our turn to be slaughtered". Florence was chopped between the eyes and was later stuck with spears and thrown over the cliff along with those who were actually dead, but she somehow managed to survive.[45]

Keeping in mind such horrific truth and the lives of these victims, Sobrino writes: "The attempt to justify God rationally in the presence of evil and suffering, has failed.... Our only choice, I believe, is to live with a theodicy unresolved in theory, and with a practice that goes on opening a pathway – with God walking it beside us – through the history of suffering".[46] Sobrino, therefore, seems to deny the possibility for a viable theodicy while still advocating a God of love and justice. He claims there is little theoretical basis to give rational arguments for why evil and suffering occurs in this world. Speaking from the vantage point of the poor and oppressed of Latin America, he does not renounce faith, but advocates a practical response, performed in solidarity with God who walks with humanity in this struggle. While Sobrino grants that a small dose of theodicy may be valuable to the poor of Latin America, he is very clear that no theoretical theodicy can ever hope to be completely successful. Although I want to save my final judgment on the possibility for a theodicy to be "resolved in theory" in my final chapter, I want to stress two key responses to his assertion.

First, it is my contention that Sobrino reaches this conclusion because he situates his theological thought from the vantage point of the poor and the oppressed. Acutely aware of their affliction, he struggles to find any theoretical theodicy that satisfies the questions and concerns that arise because of this suffering. In this vein, he would be sympathetic with Greenberg's working principle. My use of testimonies of mass atrocity is to situate myself in a similar context, although I remain sceptical of his comment that the poor could only benefit from a "little dose"

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43. Ibid.,140-1.

44. Augustine, *The City of God*, 12-3.

45. Florence told this story to fellow survivor, Immaculée Ilibagiza, at a refugee camp in Rwanda. Ilibagiza retold the story in her memoir, *Left to Tell, Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*, with Steve Erwin, Carlsbad, Hay House, 2006), 160-1. Florence was healed by a kind Hutu family, though their son (who lived with them) participated in killings every day until there were no other Tutsis in their town. If only such accounts depicting impenetrable humanity were not as rare as one would think.

of theodicy. At the same time, nurtured by his own Catholic faith and the faith of the poor that he encounters, Sobrino does not assert that our failure to construct a perfect theoretical theodicy entails renouncing faith in God. Gaps remain, which must be acknowledged, but these gaps do not have the ultimate word.

As I noted in the Introduction to this work, how a theology identifies, deliberates upon, and incorporates these gaps within any discussion of the problem of evil is of the utmost importance for there to be any possibility for a viable theodicy. Without such gaps and unresolved theories, one's faith would be a misnomer. One's faith needs to acknowledge and grapple with such gaps in order to clarify what one holds with certitude and what one holds by faith. It is a major presupposition of this investigation that Christian theological faith in our contemporary age is a humbled faith, rife with almost as many questions as there are answers. Such a faith, to borrow a term from post-Holocaust Jewish thinkers, is 'wounded' (or 'fractured' in my terminology). But this does not imply it cannot be viable or dynamic. For Christians, Christ's body and sprit on the cross were wounded and broken. But the resurrected Christ, who still bore his wounds, testifies to why hope and life can thrive amidst wounds or gaps.

D. Suggestions for Theodicy

To make theodicy more reasonable on account of its failures, especially in the context of the poor and oppressed, Sobrino offers a few suggestions. As noted above, honesty to reality and facing the issues "soberly and humbly" are fundamental steps. Additional suggestions are not to "trivialize the problem God represents, not to approach it abstractly but in the presence of the poor and the victims, out of love for them…[and] not to trivialize the answer to the problem by invoking arguments of the necessity of free will, or creating good from evil".[47] Because he is sceptical of theoretical theodicy, he focuses on the concrete and the particular lived situation of this world's victims and poor. Similar to McCord Adams's complaints that theodicy should not be carried on at too high a level of abstraction, he undermines the value of using abstract language in the context of theodicy. While he is right in stressing the need for a specific context, I would contend that abstract language is useful if it enables one to momentarily step away from a concrete situation to seek a wider and general perspective that one can then apply and test in a particular case. I have also argued (contra Sobrino) why the

46. Sobrino, *Where is God?*, 142.

privatio boni tradition remains relevant.

Sobrino also proposes a praxic theodicy, which includes

> *indignation* in response to human suffering (indignation against what human beings have done or what God has failed to do), acknowledging there is something irremediable about suffering.... [and] a utopian moment of *hope*, that God – whether or not God has the power to overcome suffering – does have the power to nurture human hope. ... In simple words, the decision to *practice* justice and kindness, and to *walk* humbly with God through history, in the darkness, protesting as we go, but always going.[48]

As we will see with Rabbi Laytner in Chapter Eight, such protest is always linked with faith: "The engine of theodicy might be resentment against God", Sobrino admits, "but for us it is love". This love is a response to the call of the suffering.[49] Few would discount the importance of praxis and living out one's love and faith, but some words on aspects of this praxis that Sobrino highlights are needed.

Sobrino advocates theological protest within this praxic-response. It is a questioning love that stems from respect of God and respect of the poor and victims. It is a protest that says human beings should not be treated this way and God is outraged at such injustice and can redeem it. Indignation and hope can be strange partners, but then theological protest has a difficult line to tread as well, maintaining faith but sometimes sharing more in common with an atheist than a theist.

However, just as I critiqued McCord Adams for comments about God that made her theodicy less spiritually attractive or pastorally effective, I need to address Sobrino's statement "whether or not God has the power to overcome suffering". He does not deny the power and has pointed out that the poor want a transcendent God who can overcome evil and suffering, but here he doubts God's redemptive power. In my criticism of McCord Adams and John Paul II, I hesitated claiming all suffering could be a participation in Christ's suffering and mission, or never wished away. As Levinas argues and Sobrino notes above, some suffering is useless or irremediable.[50] It serves no ultimate purpose, but was simply to break another human being's life and dignity, and thus is an attempt to defeat the aim and mission

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47. Ibid., 142-3.
48. Ibid., 143.
49. Ibid., 145.
50. Levinas writes: "Thus, the least one can say about suffering is that in its own phenomenality, intrinsically, it is useless, for 'nothing'" ["Useless Suffering", in *The Problem of Evil: A Reader*, ed. Mark Larrimore (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 373].

of God for this world. It is linked with the anti-reign to use Sobrino's language.[51] I would argue, similar to McCord Adams, that God could redeem the meaning and value of one's life in spite of the horrific suffering one endured, but not actually redeem some losses in the original context. In Job's case, the children who were murdered were not brought back to life in this world. Job was not compensated for the loss of his children simply by getting new ones. The new children no doubt help to assuage the pain and loss, but to say they fulfil the void completely is an insult to the life and dignity of his murdered children. To maintain the integrity of legitimate loss and questioning from that ordeal and the memory of that trauma, it would seem space would have to be left for absence, sorrow, and grief. It may not so much be a matter of redeeming that loss, but coming to live and accept it peacefully and without rancour. And if God can help in that possibility, then one can say redemption has occurred. As I will argue in Chapter Ten, redemption and healing in the post-mortem context must involve a means to accept some losses as loss, which does not necessarily detract from the promises of peace and tranquillity of the beatific vision. I would not see this as a lack on God's part, but in God respecting human autonomy and spiritual growth.

IV. Assessment

Of all the works examined so far, I share the most sympathies with Sobrino's efforts and his tentative, theodic language. I agree with his recognition of theodicy's limitations and his insistence on still probing for answers. I agree that one should approach the problem of evil from a theodic and anthropodic perspective, recognising the limitations in each approach. Such a perspective does not satisfactorily answer why there is evil in the world in the first place, but it calls for care in simply blaming God when human beings are often complicit in the suffering that is often described as 'natural' evil.

I also appreciate how Sobrino soberly looks at a devastating example of natural evil that pummels an already traumatised and poverty-stricken people yet he still speaks a message of hope and solidarity, especially in viewing the poor under the rubric of primordial holiness. While such a term must also call for renouncing passivity and the scandal of such a condition, I appreciate Sobrino's aim in seeing the poor as sacraments of God, especially in his example of a child soldier forced to

51. See Sobrino's essay "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology", in *Mysterium Liberationis, Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis, 1993), 350-88.

commit horrific acts. While the issue of how God is present with these victims needs further analysis, my inclusion of witness testimony within this work means this position is not wishful thinking on the part of a theologian: some (though, of course, not all) victims assert that belief in God is still meaningful despite (or even because of) their ordeals. The issue though is why other individuals deny such a claim and what the presence of God means in this world when atrocities and suffering seem to proliferate and many die seemingly broken and abandoned.

Another issue is Sobrino's dismissal of the general arguments in philosophical theodicies which often employ abstract language or the use of "trivial" arguments like free will or *privatio boni*. There is a danger when one jettisons such beliefs which provide a flawed, but still valuable framework for how to view this world. At the very least, one must continue challenging the limitations of these theories to search for what is still meaningful and useful about them.

Lastly, I share Sobrino's focus on Christ crucified and resurrected as a profound meaning to the mystery of suffering and the challenges and truths that the option for the poor brings in an analysis of suffering and victimisation. His turning to the poor for whether they want a suffering God and his call to ask for their interpretation of the "holy" is also important[52]; as is his including how the poor rarely thought in theodic terms in the midst of the earthquakes (though their questions were more critical in the context of mass atrocities). Still, if theodicy is only of minimal worth for the poor and oppressed according to Sobrino, its overall value is also questionable. I have included victims of mass atrocity because I have argued that their voices and interpretations need to be taken into account when developing a theodic position. Moreover, for a viable faith, I am arguing you need a viable theodicy. Sobrino seems to be challenging that claim. I also still need to grapple further with how testimonies from non-Christians like Gyatso and Partnoy challenge any 'exclusively' Christian reading to the problem of evil that says Christ is the answer to the problem of suffering. Some crucial questions still gnaw at me: does the assertion that Christ is the answer to the mystery of suffering still make sense in

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52. Sobrino writes: "I think we need to broaden the horizon in which we think about holiness. What do the victims of El Mozote have to say about it, or the people imprisoned – inhumanity, in total poverty, defencelessness, humiliation – in Kigali?" (*Where is God?*, 80). Although he does not include individual testimony from these sources, such a question, of course shares great resonance with the reasons for why I turn to testimonies of mass atrocity when examining theodicy. In his essay "The Resurrection of One Crucified: Hope and a Way of Living", Sobrino includes the words of a "poor woman, who possessed almost nothing and whose sons had been vilely murdered: 'A life after death without sufferings? How splendid!'" [*No Salvation Outside the Poor*, 103].

light of those witnesses and interpretations of their suffering who deny Christ's relevance or presence to their ordeals? Does Christ become an (as opposed to 'the') answer to the problem of evil? If so, why; and if not, why not? Subsequent chapters must continue to examine these questions.

In the next chapter, Gustavo Gutiérrez turns to the Book of Job to discuss credible God-talk from the dung heap. It is another relevant text for my purposes and one that also shares an aim with Greenberg's working principle.

Chapter Seven

GUTIÉRREZ'S *ON JOB*: TRYING TO SPEAK OF GOD FROM THE DUNG HEAP

> Once, [Camp Kommandant Amon Goeth] caught a boy who was suffering from diarrhea and was unable to contain himself. He forced the boy to eat all of the excrement before killing him.[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

In the work, *On Job*: *God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, Gustavo Gutiérrez uses the story of Job to articulate what it means to talk of God and to God in the midst of affliction. The quote above, taken from Joseph Bau's *Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry*?, presents another concrete case, not only of the excremental assault that De Pres writes about, but a story so brutal and graphic that it can stand as both reality and metaphor for the difficult task Gutiérrez takes upon himself, for how can one possibly speak of God while being forced to eat one's excrement? I refer both to the literal constraints that make speaking anything impossible and the condition that assaults the possibility for spiritual or theological language through the collapse of any discernible meaning and value to one's life. What could one possibly say in the presence of such a victim?

Bau, a survivor of the Plaszow concentration camp, tells of the boy's murder in the context of taking the reader through a detailed "guided tour" of the camp, reconstructed from "the shards embedded in [Bau's] consciousness, to construct a verifiable model of this veritable hell on earth".[2] The task is all the more pressing because the camp was obliterated. He writes that he "owes it to the countless camp inmates, those who died there and those who will carry its imprint on their souls to the end of their existence".[3] The nameless child he depicts, then, is only told in passing, but his is a case, like the babies burned in the pits, that differs greatly from Job's. First, of course, the child's dignity and possibility for speech are brutally violated. Job, despite all of his suffering and unlike the babies and the boy, at least benefited from being able to reflect upon his suffering and the moral framework of his religious tradition. Secondly, God answered Job. For the boy, all language to and of God seems gagged and swallowed in his murder.

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1. Joseph Bau, *Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry?* trans. Shlomo Yurman (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 115.
2. Ibid., 110-1.
3. Ibid., 111.

If the boy cannot speak of God, can others speak for him, and if so, how does one tread the line between speaking for the voiceless without violating their integrity and autonomy? More problematically for my purposes: Do outsiders construct such language for their own comfort? Because the boy is presumably Jewish, a Christian theodicist must be particularly careful. If Jesus is the answer to the problem of evil as John Paul II, Adams, Sobrino, and Gutiérrez argue, how can such a truth be spoken in the name of such a victim?

In the context of the horrendous suffering and destitution of Latin America (and a context that can also apply to the murdered boy above), Gutiérrez asks:

> How are we to talk about a God who is revealed as love in a situation characterized by poverty and oppression? How are we to proclaim the God of life to men and women who die prematurely and unjustly? How are we to acknowledge that God makes us a free gift of love and justice when we have before us the suffering of the innocent?[4]

Because of Job's own dramatic losses, Gutiérrez sees Job as a figure who undergoes a profound transformation in his relationship with, and beliefs in, God and in his new solidarity with the suffering victims of the world. Job becomes a figure one can follow and emulate.[5] As Peter Phan remarks, *On Job*

> is not, strictly speaking, an exegesis of the Book of the Hebrew Bible…Rather, it is a theological interpretation in the context of massive innocent suffering in Latin America because the innocence that Job vigorously claims for himself helps us to understand the innocence of an oppressed and believing people…[6]

The context of Gutiérrez's personal reading of *Job* is essential to keep in mind. With such a well-known text, one expects a diversity of readings – and so some disagreement with Gutiérrez's methods or conclusions. I'll present one case below before presenting Gutiérrez's interpretation.

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4. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job, God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis, 2002), xiv.

5. Ibid., xvii.

6. Peter C. Phan, "Prophecy and Contemplation: The Language of Liberation Theology Against Evil", in *Evil and the Response of World Religions,* ed. William Cenkner (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1997), 186.

II. Textual Analysis

A. The Book of Job: Theodicy or Antitheodicy?

While William Cenkner writes how Gutiérrez aims to "demonstra[e] how the suffering figure of Job eventually realises God's preferential love for the oppressed and disenfranchised",[7] in *The Evils of Theodicy*, Terrence Tilley argues that "Gutiérrez simply reads divine love into a text where God's love is never mentioned… For Gutiérrez, the suffering of this innocent one was educative. But Job learned nothing".[8] Tilley questions Gutiérrez's 'optimistic' reading of Job and his emphasis on God's love for all and accuses Gutiérrez of either silencing the victim of torture or promoting a soul-making theodicy.[9] Neither criticism, as I will show is entirely valid, but then the context of Tilley's argument has to be stressed as well. He is analysing the social situation of speech acts in theodic texts to prove how "engaging in the discourse of theodicy *creates* evil".[10] In justifying why evil occurs, one can come to accept the evils as normative, for example, or distribute censure to blameless victims. In Tilley's estimation, the *Book of Job* is an anti-theodicy: "Job warns against the possibility of providing a theodicy. … It is not a book of answers, but a text of warning, perhaps even a text of terror".[11]

Tilley's claims certainly have merit: for me the most damning evidence against a spiritualised reading of Job remains the wager God makes with the satan. If God had not distinguished Job to the satan, Job's individual torment would not likely have occurred. Maybe someone else would have been brutalised, but because God initiated the process, God is inevitably complicit in what then follows. The privileged knowledge of the reader adds irony to Job's faithful responses and hope for God's act of redemption. When Job's wife tells him to "Blaspheme God and die!",[12] the cynical reader cannot but think, "if only you knew the full truth". God's responses, moreover, as Alexander Donat similarly argues: "humiliates Job, degrades his value and honor, demonstrates his insignificance and unimportance,

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7. William Cenkner, "Introduction", in *Evil and the Response of World Religions* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1997), vii.
8. Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 100.
9. Ibid., 101.
10. Ibid., 3.
11. Ibid., 109.
12. Job 2:9.

turns him into 'dust and ashes'".[13] Tilley has similar reservations about the text.

Amid these divergent opinions on Job, for Gutiérrez: "It is important that we be clear from the outset that the theme of the Book of Job is not precisely suffering – that impenetrable human mystery – but rather how to speak of God in the midst of suffering".[14] He is therefore not engaging in an attempt to justify a "rational or definitive" explanation for suffering. Instead he claims the poet-author of Job:

> is quite aware that the subject is a complex one. On the other hand, faith prompts him to inquire into the possibility of finding an appropriate language about God that does justice to the situation of suffering. Not to make the effort is to risk succumbing to impotent resignation, a religion of calculated self-interest, a cynical outlook that forgets the suffering of others, even despair.[15]

As with Sobrino's text, we seem to have neither a theodicy nor an anti-theodicy per se, though Gutiérrez's search for credible theological language in the face of evil shares great similarities with one of the main themes of Sobrino's work. The key word, of course, is 'appropriate'. Gutiérrez seeks a balance between respecting the dignity and real suffering of individuals while maintaining a faith position that asserts healing and redemption is still possible because of God's love and justice. In fact, for Gutiérrez, the relationship between gratuitousness and justice "is the key to the interpretation of the book of Job".[16] Finding an appropriate theodic language that can articulate these seemingly polar terms will be one reason why Job's own journey is so relevant. Like Sobrino's aim, this theodic language cannot flinch from reality.

In fact, Tilley's criticisms about Gutiérrez's 'optimistic' reading needs further clarification. Gutiérrez (and most liberation theologians) are unrelenting in stressing the reality of random and often undeserved suffering: "Human suffering, involvement with it, and the questions it raises about God are in fact one point of departure and one central theme in the theology of liberation. But the first concern in this context is not with the 'evil of guilt' but rather with the 'evil of misfortune', the evil suffered by the innocent".[17] Gutiérrez is also cognisant that his call for others to work for peace and justice will likely lead to persecution. Such an emphasis makes the theology of liberation indispensable for any Christian theodicy because it is

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13. Alexander Donat, "Voice From the Ashes: Wanderings in Search of God", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 283.
14. Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 13
15. Ibid., 93.
16. Ibid., 82.
17. Ibid., xv. Gutiérrez acknowledges he is using terms from Adolphe Gesché.

always looking to the worst cases (recall the suffering boy above), yet strives to emphasise God's love and commitment.

For Gutiérrez, "Job shows us a way with his vigorous protest, his discovery of concrete commitment to the poor and all who suffer unjustly, his facing up to God, and his acknowledging of the gratuitousness that characterises God's plan for human history".[18] Key questions are whether the Book of Job gainsays any meaningful talk of God's gratuitous love and what are the merits of this type of love? It is also legitimate to ask (along with Tilley) whether God permitted Job to undergo his torment to teach him a lesson. While Gutiérrez's aim is to examine Job's catharsis within this text as a model for how one can speak of God and to God amidst affliction, I will also address how his depiction of God would bear on a theodicy.

B. Disinterested Religion and the Right of Protest

Like Sobrino, Gutiérrez acknowledges that the question: "'My God, where are you?'...springs from the suffering of the innocent, but also has its source in faith". This questioning and protest – which never have the last word – are also spoken and prayed in the context of disinterested religion. Because a disinterested religious ethic has been a reoccurring motif in previous chapters, I need to further define its use here compared to how previous authors employed the term.

Because Phillips disavows the afterlife, one's love of God is always removed from any possibility of gain, and so such a love is never tainted by self-serving motivations for heaven or benefits on this earth. John Paul II writes of the believer turning to God with "disinterested service", but soteriological and eschatological concerns and hopes remain essential aspects of his theology. This hope also resides in the belief in Jesus's resurrection, an event that Job's author(s) cannot be aware of. The context of Job's disinterested faith is also different from many of the poor in Latin America who unlike Job, also believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Despite these differences according to Gutiérrez, Job's example remains relevant for Christians today[19] as Job comes to embody the ideal of disinterested religion, unlike the satan whose wager and understanding of religion reflects a *quid pro quo* mentality. Moving away from that worldview, Job soon comes to see that no promises of great lands or many descendents should make one follow God. For Gutiérrez, "The rebellious but upright Job, in all his suffering and complaints, in his dogged commitment to the poor and his acknowledgement of the Lord's love, shows

18. Ibid., 102.

that his religion is indeed disinterested".[20] Despite what has happened to Job, he maintains his faith in God and, as importantly, comes to recognise in greater depth the plight of the poor and afflicted. He becomes a human example for believers to follow – especially for those of us today in the first world – as he learns to speak of God in the midst of affliction. He is also an example to individuals in the third world who repeatedly have to bear this undeserved suffering.

Such a religious response is disinterested to Gutiérrez but it is not bereft of sincere questioning, challenging, and remonstrating God. A key question, of course, is whether a disinterested faith position can also practice theological protest. While a wide-range of viewpoints try to decipher how one locates and interprets the nature of Job's grumbling, Gutiérrez acknowledges Job's protests, but maintains that Job complains about God, but never curses Him.[21] Thus, protest is kept within clear limits. According to Gutiérrez, this "spiritual struggle with God" culminates in Chapter Nine where Job even accuses God of injustice, saying that God "'laughs at the plight of the innocent'".[22] Gutiérrez calls these "bold words" but notes the rich tradition of theological protest in the Bible against how God has treated God's people or allowed others to mistreat them.[23] As we will see in the next chapter, Job is a pivotal figure in this tradition. He is a "*rebellious believer.* His rebellion is against the suffering of the innocent, against a theology that justifies it, and even against the depiction of God that such a theology contains".[24]

In this vein, Job is not simply protesting against God, but the human interpretations of God embodied by Job's companions who maintain that all suffering is deserved, and that if God is properly propitiated, good fortune will come. In rejecting this worldview, Job is seeking a more authentic faith. Gutiérrez writes: "In fact it might well be claimed that [Job's] manifestation of irrepressible feeling, even if in an unconventional form, [is] a profound act of self-surrender and hope in God".[25]

While elements of this protest will need to be renounced in light of God's response to Job,[26] Gutiérrez asserts that "This cry cannot be muted. Those who suffer unjustly have a right to complain and protest". If one questions whether a

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19. Ibid., 89.
20. Ibid., 1.
21. Ibid., 8.
22. Ibid., 57.
23. Ibid., 57.
24. Ibid., 14.
25. Ibid., 10.
26. Ibid., 87.

Christian has this right, Gutiérrez is clear: "The Son of God teaches us that talk of God must be mediated by the experience of the cross". Furthermore, because some of Jesus's last words can be discerned both as protest and faith, he adds: "In the Bible complaint does not exclude hope; in fact they go together".[27] This unorthodox union will encompass what he calls "the prophetic language of God", which I will address in the next few headings.

Echoing John Paul II, Gutiérrez continues: "[Jesus's] cry on the cross renders more audible and more penetrating the cries of all the Jobs, individual and collective, of human history. To adopt a comparison that Bonhoeffer uses in another context, the cry of Jesus is the *cantus firmus*, the leading voice to which all the voices of those who suffer unjustly are joined".[28] Gutiérrez also reminds us that despite Job's complaints and emotional protests, which sometimes border on despair, God sanctions Job's language by later telling Job and his companions that he had spoken correctly of God (42:7 and 42:8), validating theological protest kept within certain limits.[29]

C. The Development of Theological Language Through Praxis

I now want to address the two types of languages Gutiérrez employs as valid means of speaking about God amidst affliction. Acknowledging the ineffability of God, he writes that "theological thought about God is *thought about a mystery*".[30] Using Job as his guide, though, Gutiérrez wants to trace Job's struggles to identify what I would term Job's God-language epiphany. Unfortunately, for Job such an epiphany entailed the loss of almost everything he held dear. According to Gutiérrez, contemplating and formulating sound discourse on God within such a mystery requires preparation and training. Job's experiences after his losses were part of this training. Gutiérrez writes: "God is first contemplated when we do God's will and allow God to reign; only after that do we think of God".[31] Gutiérrez is not claiming one simply acts, but for theological language "to be authentic and respectful" one must "first establish [oneself] on the terrain of spirituality and practice". Echoing this notion, in "Fundamental Moral Theory in the Theology of Liberation", Francisco Moreno Réjon clarifies: "To assert that theology, or utterance upon God, is a 'second moment' implies that there is a 'first moment', antecedent to all

27. Ibid., 98.
28. Ibid., 101.
29. Ibid., 11.
30. Ibid., xi.
31. Ibid., xiii.

theological formulation, consisting in the silent language of prayer and Christian commitment".[32] It seems reasonable that the source of one's theological language is prayer, faith commitment, and the Bible. Engaging in the study of theology should accompany prayer, worship, and committed praxis. Formulating sound and respectful theology, for most of us, requires years of training and living out one's beliefs to hone and sharpen one's theological outlook and language. Job's sudden losses accelerate this process as it alters everything he thought he knew about God.

According to Gutiérrez, through Job's afflictions, Job recognises the plight of the poor and the oppressed, and this awakening changes his theological language and enables him to speak more truthfully about God. Gutiérrez writes that the language of contemplation and the language of prophecy (as evinced in the Book of Job) offer the best approaches of how one should talk about God and to God amidst suffering.[33] He is careful, however, to stress that he is not trying to over-rationalize a deeply poetic text[34] and that these two types of languages are meant to "move apart and intermingle".[35] Thus, he tries to show how "...[P]rophetic language supports and reinforces language inspired by contemplation of God".[36] The joining of these two types of language, as William Cenkner adds, enables Gutiérrez to include "worship, prayer, and mysticism as integral to the struggle for justice".[37]

D. Prophetic Language Amidst Affliction

To seek an appropriate language about God, Gutiérrez looks to the prophets of the Bible. They not only speak to God, but for God as well. He writes:

> The language of prophecy attacks the situation – and its structural causes – of injustice and deprivation in which the poor live, because it looks for 'the suffering features of Christ the Lord' in the pain-ravaged faces of an oppressed people (Puebla, §§31-39).[38]

Job also speaks prophetically as his moral vision and theological views change. Gutiérrez writes: "In the Book of Job, to be a believer means sharing human suffering, especially that of the most destitute, enduring a spiritual struggle, and

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32. Francisco Moreno Réjon, "Fundamental Moral Theory in the Theology of Liberation", trans. Robert R. Barr, in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology,* eds. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (New York: Orbis, 1993), 213.

33. Gutiérrez stresses that these two languages are "Two ways of drawing nearer to the mystery of God" (*On Job,* 88). They are obviously not the only ones.

34. Ibid., 16.

35. Ibid., 16.

36. Ibid., 94.

37. William Cenkner, "Introduction", vii.

38. Gutiérrez, *On Job,* 97.

finally accepting the fact that God cannot be pigeonholed in human categories".[39] While Gutiérrez is referring, like McCord Adams, to the limited conceptions of human justice, recall that in the last chapter, Sobrino emphasised that the Incarnation reveals the power and integrity of God's love and solidarity with the poor and oppressed of this world, as the only meaningful love is one that "share[s] the lot of those with whom it wanted to show solidarity".[40]

As Gutiérrez similarly argues "...commitment to the poor provides firm ground for prophetic talk of God".[41] Since the poor are the "favourites of God", in seeking to aid them, Job opens up for himself a means to find God, whom Job believes, "wants justice".[42] In a seminal passage from Chapter Twenty-four, Job describes and laments the exploitation of those in poverty by the wicked – "They drive away the orphan's donkey, as security they seize the widow's ox. . . From the towns come the groans of the dying / and the gasp of the wounded crying for help. Yet God remains deaf to the prayer".[43] Such response to suffering is for Gutiérrez the language of prophecy. As Peter Phan writes: "The language about God in the midst of innocent suffering then must be a prophetic one. It is a language of both denunciation and annunciation".[44]

Such language rebukes those individuals and structures that perpetuate injustice and misery but also announces to the poor that liberation is near. It calls people to move beyond their individual suffering and base their outlook on "the needs of others who cannot be ignored".[45] Job's initial focus was on his own misfortune. He wanted retribution. He wanted a hearing from God to right these undeserved wrongs. But as the story progresses, he comes to include the misfortune of others in his arguments and questions where God was for them, too. And yet, his faith in God also prompts him to reject "the doctrine of retribution that his three friends expounded in a pompous and abstract manner".[46] Gutiérrez states, however, that the language of contemplation is ultimately inadequate for Job because he seeks a deeper understanding of God and divine justice.[47] He finds deeper answers through the mystical language embodied in contemplation of God.

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39. Ibid., 16.
40. Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological View,* trans. Paul Burns and Francis McDonagh (New York: Orbis, 1999), 245.
41. Gutiérrez , *On Job,* 48.
42. Ibid., 48.
43. Ibid., 33.
44. Phan, "Prophecy", 190.
45. Gutiérrez, *On Job,* 48.
46. Ibid., 47-8.
47. Ibid., 49.

E. Disinterested Religion and the Language of Contemplation

In addition to the language of prophecy, Gutiérrez also argues that the language of contemplation is another resource to aid one in speaking about God. It acknowledges that everything comes from the father's unmerited love and opens up new "horizons of hope". Such a claim admits that "human works as such do not justify, they do not save. St. Paul says, in light of the revelation given in Jesus Christ, that human works cannot tie God's hands …The faith that saves is itself a grace from the Lord. Entrance into the kingdom of God is not a right to be won, not even by the practice of justice; it is always a freely given gift".[48] The point is to show "the transcendence of God and the gratuitousness of God's love", which are not constrained by our failures in moral action or in formulating moral concepts.

I agree that our conception of justice is limited which is why one needs to turn to a God who transcends such conceptions. Based upon similar clarification in light of my discussion of God and moral obligation from Chapter Five, I could also agree with Gutiérrez's remarks that "God does what God pleases to do. No love at all can be blocked in" as a response to why retribution in this world based on individual pleas for justice is problematic. But when I think of Camp Kommandant Goeth and some of the other perpetrators of horrendous evils, when I think of the boy forced to swallow his own diarrhea and other concrete cases of evil, I stammer at the justification that God's gratuitousness entails letting such perpetrators have the opportunity to repent when no such opportunity is permitted for the boy to live his life as it was meant to be. As Richard Rubenstein argues: "This has had the paradoxical consequence that while God shows forbearance with the wicked, He must turn a deaf ear to the anguished cries of the violated".[49] We saw Phillips raise similar objections.

In the works of Partnoy and Nomberg-Przytyk, moreover, we read how experiences of God were non-existent in moments of torture and trauma. Cries to God were made, but responses were not forthcoming. Benja, a believing Christian, was not rescued by God. God did not liberate Auschwitz. And Stalin's Russians, who did liberate some of the Nazi concentration camps, still went on to murder a staggering number of people in the gulag system.[50] Job, however, gets his day in

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48. Ibid., 89. Note he cites the term "horizon of hope" from the Puebla document.

49. Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 195.

50. The total number of premature deaths or murders because of the Stalinist regime ranges from 12 million to 20 million, but records and statistics remain less than conclusive. See Anne Applebaum, *Gulag, A History* (New York: Anchor, 2003), 578-86.

court. God responds to his complaints, though in an unpredictable way – making no reference to concrete problems and therefore not responding to the distress and questions of Job.[51] Again, for Gutiérrez, this reality accentuates not retribution but disinterested religion[52] – "the free and gratuitous initiative taken by love".[53] Such a speech rejects anthropomorphism – we can't just judge from our perspective.[54]

Gutiérrez also claims that "in [Job's] final reply what Job is expressing is not contrition but *a renunciation of his lamentation and dejected outlook.* Certain emphases in his protest had been due to the doctrine of retribution, which despite everything had continued to be his point of reference".[55] He comes to see that God, therefore, is not a prisoner "of a particular way of understanding justice".[56] Gutiérrez, because of his emphasis on Christ crucified and the "crucified people", contends that we need to move beyond justice – "not give it the final say. . . [and] to understand God's gratuitousness in relation to God's justice – to situate justice within the framework of God's gratuitous love".[57] Rebutting a claim like Rubenstein's, Gutiérrez asserts: "Belief in God and God's gratuitous love leads to a preferential option for the poor and to solidarity with those who suffer wretched conditions, contempt, and oppression, those whom the social order ignores and exploits".[58] There is, therefore, an ethical calling and obligation to heal the wounds of division and injustice, although it remains unclear how God is present in the life of those who have suffered horrendously.

Nor is it clear what happens when one applies this sense of "preference" (in the preferential option for the poor) to the boy and the Commandant who mercilessly killed him. What, for example, does God's love demand for the boy in light of this atrocity? Gutiérrez does not address issues of the afterlife here, in part because he is constrained by his focus on the Book of Job, which was written in a period dominated by a "vagueness about any life beyond the present".[59] While I will return to these issues in Chapter Ten, further reflection by Gutiérrez along these lines would have been helpful in his aim of developing God-talk in the context of the poor and oppressed in Latin America.

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51. Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 68.
52. Ibid., 72.
53. Ibid., 71.
54. Ibid., 74.
55. Ibid., 87.
56. Ibid., 87.
57. Ibid., 88.
58. Ibid., 94.

III. Assessment

Gutiérrez's aim in seeking to answer how one should talk about God and to God amidst suffering from the dung heap is an essential question for any theodicy. Like Phillips, Gutiérrez's emphasis on disinterested religion also cuts to the heart of the believer's needed outlook to maintain faith in a world where suffering can strike at any time. While his interpretation of *Job* cannot be accepted wholesale, as the argument of Tilley has great persuasive and textual force, he has presented an important midrashic reading of the Book of Job.[60] Because the text of Job opens with God making a wager with the satan, it is difficult for me to ascribe benevolence to that book's depiction of God. Even if one follows certain midrashic readings that assert Job's children deserved to die (based on the fact that Job offered sacrifices for them), God still appears culpable and complicit. To me, the deaths of Job's children are the most gratuitous acts in this book, if I take another meaning of the word that Gutiérrez wants to stress.

Moreover, if the moral of the story is so clear-cut in Job, then the biblical text did not have to be so opaque. If it is 'simply' a matter of coming to realise our need to help the poor and to recognise the link of justice and God's gratuitousness, God's response could have been a little more explicit in this paramount matter when addressing Job. Instead, as Donat argues above, God seems to bury Job – and thus the supposed didactic moral – with questions and comments about all the great beings God created. Further grappling with a conception of the justice of God in light of mass atrocity in an afterlife context would also have been helpful here, along with how Gutiérrez's interpretation of God's "gratuitousness" responds to such a dilemma.

In addition, Gutiérrez's coining of the terms language of prophecy and contemplation in the context of Job is interesting, but I remain unconvinced that this is the most valid reading of Job. While I agree with many of the salient moral and theological points that Gutiérrez raises, I also remain unconvinced that we are reading the same text when it comes to his overall conclusions. I grant that a reader could interpret Job coming to understand the plight of the afflicted at a deeper level – but not the role of a loving, personal, God, which is the aim of any theodicy to

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59. Ibid., 89.

60. Here I take the definition of midrash from Norman J. Cohen as presented by Rabbi Laytner: "midrash is the means by which Rabbis filled in the 'spaces between the sacred words of Scripture,' extending 'the text as far as they could, detailing the characters' missing actions, thoughts, and feelings' in order to answer a multitude of questions and articulate a message of contemporary, and often timeless value" [*Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Jason Aronson Inc: Northvale, 1990), 42].

defend. The God of Job, to me, is on a power-trip, wanting to prove the satan wrong. God treats Job (and especially Job's children) so indifferently, that if such a text were all we had about God, I would not engage in theodicy. Such a God would be linked with the one who urged total warfare and the massacring of all the enemies of Israel in other biblical passages that we are now burdened with.[61] Fortunately, a reader can enjoy the text of Job for its narrative and poetic flourishes and its philosophical probing, but turn to other works for hopefully, a more realistic and soothing portrait of God.

Despite these reservations, Gutiérrez's text is a useful reflection on "'the evil of misfortune', the evil suffered by the innocent" as he phrases it.[62] His attempt to develop the models for how one can talk about God amidst that suffering – a suffering that is often meaningless, undeserved, dehumanising and fatal – is also pertinent for my context.

Ultimately, for Gutiérrez the struggle for justice and the search for language about God finds its source with Jesus on the cross, which reveals that there is "Communion in suffering and in hope". While this Christological focus is developed in his other works,[63] he states that prophetic and contemplative language reach a nexus point in the language of the cross.[64] In speaking such a language, believers commit an act of remembrance as they seek to follow the life of Christ in their thoughts and actions. For Gutiérrez, "only within the following of Jesus is it possible to talk of God".[65] Palden Gyatso, Nomberg-Przytyk, and Partnoy would obviously differ with this idea. But in reading the Book of Job through the lens of the poor and oppressed in Latin America, Gutiérrez provides a profound and useful testimony on

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61. These biblical texts do, however, make for captivating stories to interest your students during a Monday morning class, and perhaps, to humble one's certitude that one's religion contains all the truth there is. Either that, or one could refer to the famous rabbinical argument trying to grapple with the injunction in Deuteronomy on how to treat the "stubborn and rebellious son" who was a "glutton and a drunkard". Once he refused to change and the boy was brought before the elders, he had to be stoned by the men of the town. As Eliezer Berkovits reminds us, there was a rich rabbinical tradition that added such meticulous regulations to the law that its implementation was nearly impossible. But the most interesting was brought forward by R. Yehuda who commented that the verse was intentionally flawed. He notes: "Why was it written? To interpret it [showing that it was not meant to be implemented] and to receive divine word for its study". In this case, R. Yahuda played off the plural sense of the word 'voice' in the verse: "Does not hearken to our voice" by saying that the parents must not only agree on the matter but must have identical voices which therefore require the same physical appearance. Since this would be impossible, the conditions for the verse will never happen. See Eliezer Berkovits, "The Nature and Function of Jewish Law", in Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism*, ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2003), 72.

62. Gutiérrez, *On Job*, xv.

63. See, for example, *A Theology of Liberation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (New York: Orbis, 1993), 102-5, 112-6, 130-40.

64. Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 101.

why one needs God amidst such suffering and how to talk to God and of God in the midst of loss and destruction. Whether such a language is applicable to the murdered boy of Plaszow and other victims of atrocity will be further assessed in the next section on Post-Holocaust Jewish Theology.

65. Ibid., 101.

Assessment of Section Two

Liberation Theology, as interpreted by Sobrino and Gutiérrez, offers rich theological and spiritual insight for any theodicy. Its unrelenting focus on the poor and the oppressed prevents any theodicy from being too abstract or ignoring the "difficult cases". Such a commitment also necessarily involves an honest theological memory that does not flinch at recalling the failures, sins, and tragedies of our world, in part, because such a memory is sustained by the story of Exodus and in Jesus's words and actions in the Gospels. Thus, a theodicy must straddle the Kingdom of God on earth and in heaven. Such a stand looks to the end of time for complete justice that is only possible through God but also believes that through God's love, Jesus's example, and the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, human beings are not alone in their commitment to establish the Reign of God on earth.

Sobrino's emphasis on primordial holiness helps to accentuate the meaning and significance of the lives of the poor and oppressed. His interlocking of theodicy and anthropodicy usefully orients a theodicist to search for the motives and whereabouts of each during times of suffering and loss.

Gutiérrez's disinterested religion seems essential for a theodicy because it orients a person to avoid unrealistic expectations of God in this world and prepares one for that self-giving love that reaches out to others in need. Both Gutiérrez and Sobrino's support of theological protest ensures injustice in this world remains faced and remembered so the need for healing is never lost. This theme in particular will be examined in more detail in the next two chapters.

So, too will Job's dilemma, but as Berkovits writes:

> To this day, theologians are arguing about the meaning of God's answer to Job. Be that as it may, one thing is certain: In the denouement, God appears to Job. … No such denouement to the drama of faith took place in the camps.… Millions were looking for him, in vain. They had heard of him by the hearing of the ear, but what was granted to their eyes to behold was 'dust and ashes,' into which they and everything dear to them were turned.[1]

These are sobering words that make the task of theodicy a precarious one, but one which the Jewish theologians I now turn to have faced candidly and credibly.

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1. Eliezer Berkovits, "Faith after the Holocaust", in Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism,* ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2003), 317.

SECTION THREE

POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH THEOLOGY: FAITH IN SPITE OF GOD

> And [God] said, 'Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.'[1]

INTRODUCTION

The aims of these next two chapters are threefold. One goal is to trace the role and history of theological protest within the Jewish tradition to test whether such theological – or believing – protest should be a crucial component of a theodicy. Secondly, I want to examine some of the key Jewish thinkers writing about the Holocaust[2] and whether their influential ideas and innovations should be incorporated into any Christian theodicy. Such an enterprise, of course, is worthy of a book in itself. And as Steven Katz reminds us: "...the radical theologian...takes the decisive element of Jewish history to be the death camps. But this is a distorted image of Jewish experience, for there is a pre-Holocaust and post-Holocaust Jewish reality that must be considered when dealing with the Nazi epoch".[3] While reaching such a position involves a life-long process of study,[4] a modest aim of these chapters will be to argue how even a cursory glance at the depth and breath of Jewish theodic sources provides an indispensable historical perspective and a rich tradition of theological argumentation for a Christian theodicist. Thirdly, I want to examine the

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1. Exodus 3:5.

2. For a comprehensive selection of Jewish theological responses to the Holocaust, see the anthology *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). The work brings together Ultra-Orthodox, Israeli, and European and American Jewish responses to the Holocaust. Particularly helpful are the introductions before each section and author.

3. Steven T. Katz, "The Issue of Confirmation and Disconfirmation in Jewish Thought After the Shoah", in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology,* ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University, Press, 2005), 15.

4. Ibid., 54, endnote no. 5.

need and commitment of memory within the Jewish tradition and why such a focus is also crucial for a Christian theodicy. I have touched on this issue and its role in trauma in Chapter One, but here I want to establish further the links between memory, protest, and faithfulness and why such a memory both sustains one's belief in God while also providing 'evidence' to doubt God's love and care.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Jewish Tradition of Arguing With God

> His workmanship is perfect in regard to all creatures and no one has a right to complain in any way.[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

The rabbinic quote above unequivocally denies the right to question God. And yet, we have seen John Paul II, Sobrino, Gutiérrez, and even the biblical God (in Job)[2] advocate some form of theological protest. Though the questioning – or arguing with – God tradition has always been marginal within Judaism, as we will see below, its long lineage offers an indispensable resource and guide for the Christian theodicist. In this chapter, therefore, I will turn to Anson Laytner's *Arguing With God: A Jewish Tradition* and examine how this tradition has developed in biblical, rabbinic, and Jewish liturgical sources. Because of the cited gaps, limits, or failures of theoretical theodicy, I want to probe further into the fruits and riches of the arguing with God tradition to conceptualise and flesh out why certain features of it are needed for a Christian theodicy.

This chapter will begin to address the following questions: What, if any, are the limits to protest within the Jewish tradition and are similar limits meaningful for my context? What is the point of such questioning and how can it be considered an act of faith? Is such a position antithetical to disinterested faith as some of our authors interpret that practice? What are the consequences for a theodicy that follows the rabbinic advice above and denies the right to protest? Lastly, Anson Laytner argues that contemporary Judaism's failure to incorporate meaningful opportunities to express doubt, anger, and fears within a spiritual and religious context (particularly in liturgy) has alienated some Jews from their tradition. How and in what way could I apply this argument to my project, which seeks to identify key features that a theodicy must identify with to be viable despite the reality of mass atrocity?

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1. From *The Classic Midrash, Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible*, trans. and ed. Reuven Hammer (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 350. The rabbis are commenting on Deut. 32:4 – "His deeds are perfect".

2. As noted in the last chapter, God sanctions how Job has spoken of God.

II. A Tradition of Theological Protest

A. Covenantal Theodicy

Like its Christian and Islamic counterparts, Jewish theodicy, according to Zachary Braiterman, has "created a profusion of theodicies meant to explain the presence of suffering in the world. They have included the denial of evil as a 'real' phenomenon; dualism; just deserts; deferred compensations; divine pedagogy; free will; vicarious atonement; [and] appeals to mystery".[3] In addition to working with the formula of justifying a loving, omnipotent God despite the reality of evil, Jewish theologians must also justify a covenantal God who has made promises of fidelity to Israel.[4] Such a relationship encompasses the belief that while God is still able to redeem evil, a faithful response looks at reality honestly to recognise injustice and evil and where both humanity – and God – fail to live up to the agreement of healing the world. As Eliezer Berkovits writes: "After the Holocaust, Israel's first religious responsibility is to 'reason' with God, and if need be, to wrestle with him".[5]

Arguing along similar lines, the Christian theologian Darrel Fasching writes: "In contrast to self-annihilation or submission, there is a powerful alternative to it in [Judaism's] narrative tradition of audacity or *chutzpah.* This tradition of audacity exemplifies a capacity to desacralize the sacred in the name of the dignity of the stranger, expressed in a hospitality for – and audacity on behalf of – the stranger".[6] Such *chutzpah* is represented by Abraham's pleading to God to spare the inhabitants of Sodom and Job's calling of God to trial for his undeserved suffering. Like the notion of the covenant, this *chutzpah* is also at the heart of the arguing with God tradition as those deemed faithful to God's covenant call God to task to redeem the

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3. Zachary Braiterman, (God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 21.

4. We saw in Chapter Three how D.Z. Phillips denies any possibility for a covenantal God ("understood in contractual terms") by arguing that God is not an agent among agents [see his *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 2004)] and my analysis of the work in Chapter Three. If God is an 'agent' like us, then some will claim we cannot resort to the language of free-will or God's mystery to hide God's responsibility. The goodness of God is then brought into question. We will see how Richard Rubenstein argues on similar lines. For Phillips, belief in God has to be disinterested and so removed from any expectation of redemption in this world. Thus, the covenantal partnership infused in the Hebrew (and Christian) Scriptures is denied. Some Jews would counter Phillips's claim by expressing God's immanence and transcendence or argue that that the existence of the Jewish people still testifies to a biblical relationship with God. Some will even look to the re-establishment of Israel as a symbol of this ongoing relationship.

5. Eliezer Berkovits, "Faith after the Holocaust", in Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism,* ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2003), 316.

6. Darrel Fasching, "Ethics After Auschwitz and Hiroshima", in *The Genocidal Temptation: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda, and Beyond*, ed. Robert S. Frey (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 17.

world and right certain wrongs. This process is often exemplified in the law-court pattern of prayer.

B. The Law-Court Pattern of Prayer

Taking the reader through biblical, rabbinic, liturgical, and Eastern European poetry composed after the Holocaust, Anson Laytner's *Arguing With God: A Jewish Tradition* reveals how a faith-practice of arguing with God has been sustained during periods of waxing and waning throughout Judaism's history right up to and after the Shoah. From such a perspective, one is reminded that as destructive as the Shoah was, as systematic the slaughter by the Nazis and their allies, rabbis and faithful Jews in ghettos and camps did not have a dearth of historical and biblical material from which to draw some parallel, some sense that this was a type of dejá vú.[7] The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE was a watershed event in this regard, but there were others as well.

According to Laytner:

> The Jewish liturgy heritage is replete with laments and dirges, complaints and arguments, all protesting God's mistreatment of His people....This history of suffering has given rise to a unique literature of argument prayers....Argument with God – called the 'law-court' pattern of prayer by scholars – is a particularly (and perhaps uniquely) Jewish response to the problem of theodicy ... [that though] rooted in deep faith, nevertheless calls God to task for his lapses of duty which result in suffering and injustice.[8]

This calling of God to task, embedded in the uniqueness of the Abrahamic covenant, makes it seem as "though God and the Jewish people grew up together and so treat each other with the familiarity of old friends or lovers".[9] Just as God is supposed to be patient with the Jewish people, so too, must they be patient with God, trusting that God will maintain God's side of the covenant. And yet, the reserve of patience is not unlimited, and so in particularly troubling times, the rabbis plead for divine aid and redemption and remind God of God's promises. As Laytner argues, even the Hebrew root word of prayer – *tefillah* which comes from the verb root *palal* – has an additional meaning beyond sacrifice,

> manifesting 'a bargaining spirit' in a legal, or law-court, context....This

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7. Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990), 131.
8. Ibid., xv.

> second understanding of *palal* corresponds to the use of other legal terms to describe varied aspects of the divine-human relationship generally associated with the concept of 'prayer'. Chief among them was *riv*, a legal case or controversy, which was also applied to the divine-human relationship....In the Bible and rabbinic literature, this law-court pattern is used in three situations: in the human court, in the heavenly court, and in divine-human controversies....[T]he third usage depicts situations in which an individual (or Israel) brings a charge against God himself. The appeal is thus both against God yet also to God, making Him, paradoxically, both judge and defendant.[10]

We will see how this process has developed after the Shoah and whether God can be blamed and accused, and yet still be relied upon and trusted for deliverance; considered unjust in one regard, but still be the ultimate God of justice; hidden or silent in the face of mass atrocity, yet still be the Supreme God of mercy. How these contradictions are maintained and formulated approaches the root of post-Holocaust Jewish faith, and any theodicy.

Because "Jewish conversation always begins from the Bible", as Sheldon R. Isenberg writes,[11] I will first assess how the arguing with God tradition developed in the *Tanach*.

C. Biblical Examples of Protest

The Bible is replete with examples of protest as Laytner reminds us.[12] One can turn, for example, to Abraham's pleading for God to spare the innocent before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorah (Genesis 18:23-32) or to Moses's pleading to God not to destroy the Israelites on various occasions (Exodus 32). The last example invokes a number of tropes in the arguing with God tradition: recalling God's own words of promised fidelity, playing on God's honour – "God's own name will be besmirched",[13] and arguing from merit, "linking his personal fate with the fate of the people".[14] Some other biblical examples include the prophet Elijah's challenge to

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9. Ibid., xvi.
10. Ibid., xvii.
11. Sheldon R. Isenberg, "From Myth to Psyche to Mystic Psychology: The Evolution of the Problem of Evil in Judaism", in *Evil and the Response of World Religions,* ed. William Cenkner (St. Paul: Paragon, 1997), 17.
12. See footnotes 14 and 23 of Chapter 1 (Laytner, *Arguing With God,* 252-253) for an extensive list of "other examples of the law-court pattern in Prophets" and "other examples of national lament".
13. Ibid., 11.
14. Ibid., 11.

God in front of the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-37), the "confessions" of Jeremiah (11:20, 20:12), and the Psalms of Petition and the Book of Lamentations.[15]

Psalm 22 is a 'typical' example of the law court pattern of prayer that contains some of its key characteristics. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus's words on the cross – "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" – are the lament and opening address, but if one reads the rest of the psalm, we get the lengthy presentation of facts: "All who see me mock me; / they curl their lips, / they shake their heads. / 'Let him commit himself to the Lord; let Him rescue him'" (22:8-9) and a concluding petition: "Deliver me from a lion's mouth; / from the horns of wild oxen rescue me. / Then will I proclaim Your fame to my brethren" (22:22-3). Notice the use of the conditional – if you do this, then I will do that. Lastly, there is a "divine response to the petition". Here, the psalmist anticipates God's answer so he can proclaim: "the Lord's fame shall be proclaimed to the generation to come; they shall tell of his beneficence to people yet to be born. For He has acted" (22:31-2). While the prophets also embody such faith and trust, they, too, are not without some acute questioning of God and moments of doubt.

According to Laytner, for example, "The problem of theodicy lies at the heart of Jeremiah's complaints". While having faith in God, Jeremiah is still troubled by how long he is waiting for a just verdict. In this sense, Jeremiah joins other believers who cry: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?" (Jeremiah 12:1).[16] In Chapter Two, Alicia Partnoy expressed how she expected no such divine aid while tortured and imprisoned in Argentina.[17]

Unlike Partnoy, and despite the ambiguity in God's answer, Job is privileged to hear God in the whirlwind. Not surprisingly, Laytner places the story of Job firmly within the "law-court pattern and the arguing with God motif" and writes that the book's author "builds upon them with such intensity that he has been regarded as the apex of the law-court-form".[18] We encountered some of these arguments in the previous chapter. Laytner notes that part of the explanations in Job arises from the post-exilic experience. He identifies three themes common through books like Job and Ezekiel: "First, against the threat of Persian dualistic theology, we find the assertion that the Lord is the sole author of all, both light and dark, good and

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15. Ibid., 16-7.
16. Ibid., 20.
17. See Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School: Tales of Survival and Disappearance* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1998), 86.
18. Laytner, *Arguing With* God, 32.

evil....Second, Job (21:19-21) and Ezekiel (18:33-10-19) propose a system wherein each individual, each generation, is rewarded or punished according to their deeds alone. . . and Third, all these works hold out to Israel the hope of redemption".[19]

This hope of redemption and trust in the Lord, according to Laytner, "brings us to the very threshold of the rabbinic point of view, which *ultimately* resolves the problem of theodicy along the lines developed by the postexilic prophets and Psalm 73, that is, through belief in the Messianic redemption, retribution in the World to Come, the resurrection of the dead to eternal life, and the acceptance of suffering as chastisements of divine love".[20] While this position becomes the dominant strand, it is not without some opposition – as elements of the arguing with God tradition occupy their own place amidst the traditional practices.[21]

D. Rabbinic Use of Biblical Arguments with God

In *The Classic Midrash, Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible,* Reuven Hammer notes the rabbis' interpretation of Exodus 15:6 ("Your right hand, O Lord, magnificent in power, your right hand, O Lord, has shattered the enemy"):

> Ingeniously the Sages inserted missing elements into Biblical stories, in this case the concept of repentance, which is central to later Biblical Judaism and to Rabbinic Judaism, but does not appear in Genesis. It was inconceivable to them that God would not be willing to offer even the worst sinners an opportunity to repent and would destroy them unless there was clearly no hope for their salvation.[22]

Such an attempt sought to justify cases of apparently innocent suffering that were wrongly interpreted to prove an unjust response of God. Commenting on Deuteronomy 32:4 – "His deeds are perfect" – we read in the Commentaries: "His workmanship is perfect in regard to all creatures and no one has the right to complain in any way. No one can consider things and say, 'If only I had three eyes! If only I had three hands!' ... the verse says, YEA ALL HIS WAYS ARE JUST (Deut 32:4). He judges all creatures and gives what is appropriate to them".[23]

As Sheldon R. Isenberg adds: "Rabbinic explanation of suffering or evil emphasises that no suffering is undeserved and no sin ultimately remains

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19. Ibid., 36-7.
20. Ibid., 37.
21. Ibid., 37.
22. Reuven Hammer, trans. and ed., *The Classic Midrash, Tannaitic Commentaries on the* Bible (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 112.
23. Quoted from ibid., 350.

unpunished. They went to extraordinary lengths to affirm God's justice. They even search diligently to find some failure to fulfill *a mitzvah,* a divine commandment, to justify the suffering of the heroic martyr Rabbi Akiba".[24] Similarly, Laytner refers to "the triumph of Rabbi Akiba's submissive theology" and experience of suffering – that suffering should be borne in hope and trust.[25] As Eliezer Berkovits comments: "The classical example of Jewish martyrology is the manner of death of R. Aki[b]a. As they were tearing the flesh from his body with iron-pronged combs, 'he took upon himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven'".[26] R. Akiba dies without protest or questioning but with the *shema* on his lips. Berkovits also adds: "The hour when they took R. Aki[b]a to his death was the time for the recitation of the *shema*".[27] His martyrdom was even more heroic because he faithfully fulfilled the requirements of the law until the end. He "was doing what he had been doing every day of his life. It was, one might say, routine. The extraordinary situation invested the routine with extraordinary meaning and dignity".[28]

While we will encounter the rabbis who refuse to go to this extraordinary length – or do so and are still not satisfied – we need to remember that most mainstream Jewish thinkers prior to the Holocaust would profess traditional faith and trust in God and seek reasons for why suffering was deserved. We also need to keep in mind the historical context in which a rabbi resorted to a law court prayer, often "to refute the attacks of gnosticism and Christianity while responding to the ultimate questions and doubts of the Jewish people".[29]

As Laytner notes: "the law-court prayer never acquired the stamp of legitimacy, nor gained the currency in normative Jewish practice that Akiba's teachings did, nor could it, for it was unsuited to the task of sustaining the people over an indefinite length of time such as the Exile represented".[30] D.Z. Phillips, in his comments on John Roth's protest theology, expresses his hesitation in supporting protest as a faith response, as he felt such a confrontation with God would eventually lead to the dissolution of the relationship.[31] Phillips seems to imply that because of the extent and magnitude of evil in the world, once one embarks on this path of protest, the accusations and the rebuke of God would seem constant, hardly the 'ingredients' for

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24. Isenberg, "From Myth to Psyche", 22.
25. Laytner, *Arguing With God*, 62.
26. Berkovits, "Faith After the Holocaust", 328.
27. Ibid., 329.
28. Ibid., 329.
29. Laytner, *Arguing With* God, 129.
30. Ibid., 129.
31. Phillips, *Problem of* Evil, 118.

a dynamic, religious relationship. The same tendency is likely to occur with the law-court prayers if not used carefully and in moderation.

It is also important to remember that both the example of Rabbi Akiba and the questioning of God tradition are two poles within Jewish theodic responses rooted in faith and love in God. As Braiterman stresses:

> Despite the boldness of these texts, rabbinic authors do not complain against God lightly. Their challenges must meet proper conditions. Torah constitutes one crucial criteria. In the *Lamentations Rabbah* trial scene, Moses holds God to His own law … [and] God can only be tried before the law by those who champion it. The author of one midrash clearly makes his point when he asks: 'Do you know who can protest against His decree and say to him ''Why do you do such a thing?'' He who observes the commandments'. … [O]nly authorized persons are entitled to complain – and only for the right reason.[32]

And yet, despite its traditional restriction to the religiously orthodox and devout, for Laytner, the arguing with God tradition can be effective as a personal and spiritual response for a wide audience. I would add that such protest could also be a spur to a deeper faith and be a means to face evil and suffering honestly while still articulating a convincing case for belief in God. In fact, even to hear such stories or comments – recall Jeremiah's questioning above – and to suspend one's strictly metaphysical or philosophical notion of God, can be cathartic in a time of spiritual crisis. Phillips may be right in critiquing the practice of placing God as an agent among agents within the human moral community, but there is something endearing and spiritually satisfying in these rabbinic attempts to speak of God and to God amidst suffering.

In fact, midrash, Talmud, and *piyyutim* (poetic embellishments or hymns "to be sung prior to, or after, the standard prayers, and of poetic inserts in the standard prayers themselves"[33]) contain a number of insightful and provocative attempts to address the question of suffering and God in the context of prayer. It is a last-line approach and one made by someone who is faithful to the covenant.

Laytner's focus on some humanising and insightful rabbinic commentaries helps to illustrate his overall thesis on the relevance of the arguing with God tradition for contemporary Jews. In one instance, the rabbis tried to add further reasons to Abraham's pleading on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah: "(Address):

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32. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz,* 54.

Master of the universe! / (Petition): You swore that You would not bring a flood upon the world [again], as it is written: 'For this is as the waters of Noah to me: for I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall never again go over the earth' [Isaiah 54:9]. A flood of water You won't bring, but a deluge of fire You would bring?! Would You with subtly evade Your [the] oath? If so, You shall not have fulfilled the oath. . . If You don't let up a bit, Your world cannot endure".[34] The idea of God being persuaded by this remark may be humorous, but the rabbis are also raising a legitimate protest: how can God allow and inflict such devastation without dire consequences? They are also following precedent. If such arguments worked for Moses or Abraham, why can it not work again?

In another common motif, the rabbis put in the mouth of Cain an accusation that rebukes God for not acting to stop the first murder: "This resembles the case of two who quarrelled and one is killed. But a third fellow was there who did nothing to intervene between them. Upon whom does the blame rest if not the third fellow? Thus it is written: [His blood] cries out to me [Ĕly] – it cries out against me [Aly]".[35] Calling God an immoral bystander is a stark religious step. If a human being is guilty if he idly stands by while another is bludgeoned to death, what does such culpability mean if the 'bystander' is God? In other instances, Cain laments the imperfection of human nature – the argument of humankind's evil inclination noted in Genesis – and prays for leniency in judgement. "The Rabbis recognised that even someone like Elijah made use of this argument when he said to God on Mount Carmel: 'You have turned their hearts backwards'".[36] In this vein, the rabbis engage in anthropodicy and place a fair share of censure and responsibility on God. If God created human beings with an "evil inclination", it should not be surprising that they inevitably sin and thus need repentance.

As noted, the postexilic community as Lamentations testifies, had to face abandonment and catastrophic loss. In a rabbinic counter-suit from *Lamentations Rabbah*, the rabbis try to justify why the Jewish people are punished in the Babylonian exile (which also applies to the Roman destruction of the Temple). In the text, as Laytner describes, "Jeremiah, at God's behest, rouses the Patriarchs and Moses from their graves to weep and lament over Israel's destruction for (and with) God. But the occasion for lamenting soon turns into a confrontation between Israel's ancestors and God in which the patriarchs and Moses accuse God of great

33. Laytner, *Arguing With God*, 127.
34. Ibid., 46.
35. Ibid., 58-9.

injustice".[37]

One by one, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses describe the difficulties they had to endure while remaining faithful. Arguing on account of ancestral merit (*zekhut avot*), they plead their case in the hope of eliciting a response from God. God is silent. Finally, Rachel comes before God and says:

> 'Sovereign of the Universe, it is revealed before Thee that Thy servant Jacob loved me exceedingly and toiled for my father on my behalf for seven years. When those seven years were completed. . . my father planned to substitute [Leah] for me to wed my husband....I relented, suppressed my desire, and had pity on my sister that she should not be exposed to shame[38]....And I gave my sister all the signs that I had given my husband, so that he might think that it was I. Not only that, I crept under the bed in which he lay with my sister and when he spoke with her, she was silent and I spoke for her so that he would not recognise my sister by her voice. I acted lovingly towards her and I was not jealous and I did not put her to shame...Now if I, who am but flesh and blood, dust and ashes, was not jealous of my rival and did not put her to shame, why should You, O Eternal King, the loving and merciful one, be jealous of idols who have no reality in them, so that you have sent my children into Exile and let them be slain by the sword and suffered their enemies to do what they wished with them?'[39]

Note the clever textual additions to the story from Genesis – the beautiful human touches – from Rachel initially overhearing the news of her father's plot and sharing signs with Jacob to thwart Laban, to then feeling pity for her sister and rival and so choosing to hide under the bed as the love of her life, Jacob, consummates his marriage to Leah. During the marriage night, Rachel speaks for her sister with a voice of joy and ecstasy as she no doubt grieved and suffered within. Here Rachel highlights her perceived 'degraded' state as a woman who still shows inspiring feats of kindness, patience, and empathy, while God seems to flounder in comparison.

Although God is silent after Moses and Abraham's pleadings, Rachel's candid and sincere speech elicits a surprising reaction.[40] As Braiterman notes: "Here it is

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36. Ibid., 62. The biblical quote is 1 Kings 18:37.
37. Ibid., 76-7.
38. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 51.
39. Laytner, *Arguing With* God, 79.
40. Ibid., 80.

God who must withdraw his complaint against Israel and repent before Rachel!"[41] Christians would never expect Jesus to repent or seek forgiveness from another. It would be considered blasphemy and heresy. And yet there is something reassuring about the notion of God apologising here, though such an apology also raises deeper, problematic assertions about God's transcendent nature and omnipotence. Braiterman continues:

> Authors of other *aggadot* (narratives) go further still and depict divine malevolence. *Exodus Rabbah* contains a remarkable story comparing Job to a drunken palace guard rashly cursing the governor and His justice....In the midrash, Job begs for forgiveness upon witnessing God imprisoning Miriam, banish Moses, blind Isaac, sentence Abraham, and cripple Jacob. While rare, the motif of a violent God is not isolated to this retelling of Job. Inverting the kindly paternalism more common to classical Jewish sources, some Rabbis depict God as a violent *pater familias* – a wife beater, an abusive parent, a child killer.[42]

In the Talmud (Sanhedrin 105a), we hear how a Rabbi of Berditchev asked a tailor to retell his argument with God from the day before. The tailor says he told God: "You wished me to repent of my sins. I have committed only minor sins....But you, O Lord, have committed grievous sins: You have taken babies from their mothers, and mothers from their babies. Let us be quits: may You forgive me, and I will forgive you". The Berditchever replied: "Why did you let God off so easily? You might have forced him to redeem all of Israel!"[43] Here again, we see the affirmation that God must address and respond to the extent of evil in the world and that faith demands a response and answer, even while recognising that the ways of God are a mystery. Such a faith response of questioning is also represented in Jewish liturgy.

E. Protest within Liturgy – Retrieving the Tradition of *Piyyutim*

The provocative tradition of *piyyutim* in the Jewish liturgy is for Laytner a long lost resource. As noted above, these were hymns or poetic embellishments spoken or sung before or after a standard liturgical piece of liturgical praise. In one example Laytner writes that:

> Sandwiched between two pious assertions lies Issac bar Shalam's bitter

41. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz)*, 52.
42. Ibid., 53.
43. Layner, *Arguing With God*, 184.

> protest. 'There is no God besides You,' says the liturgy. – 'There is none like You among the dumb,' says Issac bar Shalam. It is obvious that the tone of Issac bar Shalam's poem is wholly out of keeping with that of its adjacent prayers....In the prayer book, protest came to co-exist with faith: the celebration of the redemptive past became coeval with the lamentation of the unredeemed present.[44]

One can imagine how provocative such an effect could be. Latyner writes: "When these poems were incorporated into the liturgy service, a dialectic dialogue was created in which faith and love of one generation were displayed against the doubts and anger of a later generation. . . Both stances had legitimacy as a Jewish response to suffering. And more significantly, both sought to affirm the same beliefs and values: love of God, faithfulness to the Torah, trust in God's power".[45] While such a tradition has a history in the Jewish faith (its origin is considered between the second and sixth centuries C.E.),[46] according to Laytner, this tradition is tragically minimal to non-existent within contemporary Judaism.[47] What he laments can also be said of many Christian churches and believers: "Cut off from the tradition of protest and argument that is the heritage of earlier times, ignorant of the concept of prayer as protest, and deprived of the rich vocabulary of liturgical protest, modern Jews have no outlet to express their darker thoughts to God – certainly not through conventional worship services in a contemporary synagogue or temple!"[48] Expressing those "dark thoughts" to God in a liturgical and religious context may be essential to face and accept such a reality and come to see how God can still be present within such suffering. Recall how God expects such questioning according to John Paul II, and so repressing these thoughts could also inhibit an honest spiritual struggle and relationship with God.

In this context, Laytner illustrates how the arguing with God tradition has been reinvigorated and altered by contemporary Jewish poets and authors. While the rabbi was the people's voice in the medieval period, the poet and author also assume that role today. Laytner cites the work of Irving Howe and Eliezer Greenberg who point out that the heart of the post-Holocaust Yiddish poet "was pledged neither to the world nor to God, but the people who believed in God or had only yesterday believed, or for whom the vision of God was inseparable from the vision of

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44. Ibid., 138-9.
45. Ibid., 174-5.
46. Ibid., 127.
47. Ibid., 175.
48. Ibid., 176.

peoplehood".[49] Such a representative voice could be far removed from the faith-filled cries of Jeremiah. Salient questions are whether it is meaningful for anyone to protest God and when theological protest courts blasphemy.

III. Conclusion: Treading a Thin Line – Theological Protest and Blasphemy

It is crucial to recall the traditional criteria for protest as one treads the line between hope and despair, faith and blasphemy. There may be something liberating and authentic about a no-holds barred protest of God that is available to anyone, but such protests need to have some limitations to maintain a living connection to traditional faith and religious identity. While some theologians will call God abusive[50] to maintain faith, while others seem to advocate a complete severance from Jewish covenantal and biblical belief, at some point change can be so radical that all continuity with one's faith tradition is lost, and with it, one's religious identity. The rabbis who protested did so because of the injustice they witnessed or experienced and the belief that God opposed such injustice and would heal or redeem it. Without that belief, the protest becomes an empty curse and has little to do with any theodicy.

Recall the rabbinic commentary of Exodus 15:11, "WHO IS LIKE YOU, O LORD, AMONG the CELESTIALS (*elim*) (Ex. 15:11). WHO IS LIKE YOU … AMONG THE SILENT (*ilmim*), O LORD. Who is like you – seeing the shame suffered by your children and remaining silent, as it is said …"[51] Playing on the Hebrew word *elim*, the rabbis question why God is silent (*ilmim*) or refer to a hidden God. It is a daring interpretation; however, invoking Isaiah 42:14-15, the rabbis still affirm that God will intervene in the future: "in the past I KEPT STILL AND RESTRAINED MYSELF but from now on I WILL SCREAM LIKE A WOMAN IN LABOR, I WILL PANT AND I WILL GASP".[52] While God is accused of failing to fulfil present duties, additional words are added to Scripture to speak faithfully and audaciously for God and claim God will "scream like a woman in labor" from now on. A close line is walked, but the text still remains faithful to Jewish tradition and beliefs.

To a Christian theodicist, the arguing with God tradition in its biblical and

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49. Quoted in Laytner, *Arguing With* God, 197.

50. See the section on Rabbi David Blumenthal in Chapter Nine.

51. Translated from *Mekhilta Shirata* 8, II 60 in *The Classic Midrash, Tannaitic Commentaries on the Bible,* Reuven Hammer, trans. and ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 117.

52. Ibid.,117.

formulaic outline is not completely viable today.[53] One does not want to maintain that God can somehow be persuaded by mere human reasoning or must be reminded of the need to act. Such a stance implies God is easily malleable or negligent. And yet, at its core, this tradition speaks of a personal, dialogic relationship between God and the individual (or community) which is sustained and guided by the love of God and belief in God's plan for this world. The individual speaks out against injustice and expects God to thwart such injustice because God is a God of mercy and justice. In the previous chapter, Gutiérrez stressed that awareness of God's gratuitousness demands a disinterested faith position as one is called to speak out and combat this injustice but not to expect one is entitled to automatic liberation or for one's enemies to be vanquished in this world. In the next chapter, I will highlight how Eliezer Berkovits in particular expands these ideas. Also important here is the nature and context of prayer, an issue I will take up in Chapters Ten and Eleven, particularly in asking how the reality of mass atrocities and evil have challenged the role and value of prayer.

Finally, while the doubt and questioning of God has occurred before and after the Holocaust, the one difference according to Laytner is that: "Other generations may have doubted, but only today has this doubt reached epidemic proportions".[54] While I advocate the need for a believer to have a venue to express what Laytner calls "dark thoughts" to God, can faith still survive amidst such grave doubts? In his personal afterword to his book, Laytner writes: "For many of us today, the argument is no longer rooted in faith: it is rooted in doubt".[55] When one's religious faith is grounded in such unstable roots, it is not surprising that traditional theodicy would be entirely rejected or altered to an almost unrecognisable state. At the same time, there is the compelling argument that such unstable roots provide the possibility for a more authentic, dynamic faith. I will examine this contentious assertion in the next chapter.

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53. Laytner writes that the theme of arguing with God remains widespread, but rarely depicted in the law court pattern of prayer. He speculates this may be due to "the changing nature of Jewish education (and the knowledge of classical Jewish prayer formats), perhaps due to the full transformation of the theme from liturgy to folk culture" (*Arguing With God,* 197).

54. Ibid., xxi.

55. Quoted in ibid., 236.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CLAMOUR OF ANTITHEODICY: AMIDST AND 'AFTER' THE SHOAH

> The Israelites cried out to the Lord, and the Lord raised a champion for the Israelites to deliver them.[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I examined the Jewish arguing with God tradition and sought to develop how Christian theodicists could benefit from incorporating various features of this tradition within their theodic positions. In this chapter I will highlight salient features supported by some post-Holocaust Jewish thinkers who offer invaluable insights or challenges to the Christian theodicist. Just as I turned to liberation theology because of that theology's focus on the voiceless and the forgotten of society, I turn to Jewish post-Holocaust theodicy because of that tradition's grappling with whether and how faith in God can still be possible despite the Holocaust and other historical ruptures. If a Christian theodicy is to be viable in the face of mass atrocity; in Greenberg's terms: to speak in the presence of the burning children; and in my context: to incorporate and address the horrors witnessed within testimonies of mass atrocity; turning to Jewish post-Holocaust thought seems a necessary step. I'll present my case below.

II. POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH THEOLOGY

A. OVERVIEW

In *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought*, Zachary Braiterman focuses on two generations of Jewish Post-Holocaust thinkers and argues that the first group – Martin Buber, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, and Mordecai Kaplan – only spoke of the Shoah obliquely as the wounds were too raw.[2] Braiterman claims that within their works traces of distress and despair mark their texts while they try to "affirm guardedly optimistic appraisals

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1. Judges 3:9

2. Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 7. For a different view, see Gershon Greenberg, "Introduction" [to "Part One: Ultra-Orthodox Responses During and Following the War"], in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Greenberg contends that there were earlier Jewish accounts dealing with

of God".[3] The next generation had the benefit of the widespread publication of Holocaust memoirs and more information and time – providing a "sufficiently developed discourse" – to try to assess the meaning of such a catastrophic event. One of Braiterman's main arguments is that after the Shoah, "Jewish thinkers make little to no use of theodicy – explicit or implicit".[4] Antitheodic strands dominate. This insight also comes as a warning to those who refuse to acknowledge this truth: "sole recourse to theodicy may ultimately cripple contemporary religious discourse by forcing philosophers and theologians to defend the indefensible".[5] In addition to the questions raised in the previous chapter, I will also test and examine this claim below.

B. Affinity with Postmodernism

One of Braiterman's aims is to show how postmodern theories – despite different characteristics and aims with post-Holocaust theology –

> help illuminate post-Holocaust thought on at least two counts: First, they provide analytical tools with which to identify and evaluate the play of difference that permeates tradition. . . Second, postmodernism has come to shape the very same thematic horizons occupied by post-Holocaust Jewish thinkers.[6]

From the works of Emanuel Levinas, Edmund Jabes, Edith Wyschogrod, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Francois Lyotard, Maurice Blanchot, and Mark Taylor, Braiterman identifies four recurring themes crucial to analysing and phrasing (or rephrasing) the questions raised in our post-Holocaust world:

> [1] the unstable field that constitutes historical consciousness, [2] the experience, memory, and threat of catastrophe and rupture in the twentieth century, [3] the impotence of language and reason before the '*tremendum*', and [4] the potentially reorienting significance of the supplement, the trace, and the fragment.[7]

We saw many of these same issues at play within my discussion of how to read testimonies of mass atrocity and in my analysis of the texts themselves. The key strand is the theme of the probable, the sense of dissolution and instability, along

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the Holocaust but that "…the sources were almost exclusively orthodox (and in Hebrew and Yiddish), and they tended to be ignored by the non-Orthodox" (11).

3. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 7.
4. Ibid., 5.
5. Ibid., 32.
6. Ibid., 9.
7. Ibid., 9.

with the proliferation of radical doubt into all the horizons of identity within humankind – their conscience, reason, memory, language, and history – which are normally relied upon to navigate one's way between truth and falsity, light and darkness, right and wrong. One of the key issues for Braiterman in discussing these contemporary Jewish thinkers is to examine how they revise tradition – seeking to forge new ground in Judaism – though with mixed success to continuity.

As postmodern thought – and the historical caesuras like the Shoah that mark its boundaries and limitations – have overturned and sown mass confusion into traditional categories and guides, it is inevitable that their effects would be felt in the realm of theology.[8] "As I see it", Braiterman argues, "post-modern and post-Holocaust thinkers inhabit different sectors of style, mood, and use within the same mental and cultural universe".[9] My use of texts from cultural studies and literary criticism in the first two chapters underwrites and develops this important insight. It also influences how one develops a theodicy, particularly in reading and interpreting the events, signs, and symbols of our contemporary world.

C. The Rise of Post-Holocaust Discourse

According to Braiterman, in the aftermath of the Shoah, following the Eichmann trial and Arendt's prognosis of the banality of evil, and after Elie Wiesel's *Night*, a few key Jewish theologians and philosophers relentlessly investigated the truths and challenges inflicted by the Holocaust. What came to be called post-Holocaust theology was initiated and developed within a growing discourse throughout the 1960's and 1970's and developed in such fields as law, literature, cinema, theatre, philosophy, sociology, history, and psychoanalysis. Richard Rubenstein's book, *After Auschwitz*, remains the fulcrum upon which many subsequent theologians

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8. For a helpful introductory essay to Postmodern Theology see Graham Ward, "Postmodern Theology", in *The Modern Theologians: Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David Ford (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 322-338.

9. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 10. For his argument that "the writings of Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim coalesce into what Michel Foucault called a common discursive formation. . . a network of rules, assumptions and expression operating anonymously upon the subjects who speak within it", see ibid., 12-13, and the Conclusion. Since this is an elaborate and sustained argument not directly related to my purposes here, I refer the interested reader to that section of Braiterman's book. While Braiterman's argument is that such a discourse bears on cultural life and that "religious cultures prove intrinsically plastic" (12), I want to stress that the dominance of fragment, flux, and instability in postmodern thought inevitably has its limits – or, of course, what would become whole, stable, and static is precisely that protean characteristic; moreover, emphasising Newman's insight, if there is no basic continuity of tradition, such a tradition – while certainly plastic and able to be 'adapted', modified, or clarified – can change to the point of unrecognisability and so what results is no longer what was in any meaningful sense.

turn.[10] Braiterman writes that its publication "marks a milestone distinguishing modern Jewish theology from contemporary Jewish thought".[11] He continues:

> In the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's, Rubenstein, Berkovits, and Fackenheim began to rework received notions about God and covenant by rereading traditional Jewish texts. In the process (and despite fierce disagreement among themselves), they have articulated a uniquely post-Holocaust theological sensibility dominated by what we are about to call *antitheodicy.*[12]

Just as I challenged whether Phillips could advocate theism without theodicy, an issue here is whether antitheodicy is compatible with theism or whether theism needs elements of antitheodicy.

D. Between Theodicy and Antitheodicy

If one speaks of traditional Jewish thought – especially as embodied in Ultra-Orthodox Jewish positions – the God of the Bible and of today, is an omnipotent, Creator God who loves and chooses his people but is a God of both justice and mercy who during various times of history, inflicts punishment upon the Jewish people for their transgressions. For some, even the Holocaust fits into this paradigm or becomes interpreted "as a sacrificial precondition for the coming of the Messiah, embodied further in the creation (resuscitation) of the State of Israel".[13]

However, according to Braiterman,

> against the grain of rabbinic Judaism and modern Jewish thought, post-Holocaust thinkers turned to the drama of priestly cult, a morally absent deity, the protesting Job, the heresy of Elisha b. Abuye,[14] abandoned wives, a plaintive community. These once marginalized but now privileged

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10. Richard Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and its Legacy* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003), 335. Saul Friedländer has highlighted how "the NBC miniseries *Holocaust* in 1978-79…became a turning point of sorts all over the West, drawing increased attention to the extermination of the Jews as the defining event of the Nazi period" ["*Facing the Shoah:* Memory and History", in *Humanity at the Limit*: *The Impact of the Holocaust Experience on Jews and Christians*, ed. Michael A. Singer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 3].

11. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 87.

12. Ibid., 4. In the "Problem of Evil" (1977), Richard Swinburne writes that the antitheodicist "denies [the claim that it is 'not morally wrong for God to create or permit various evils'] by putting forward moral principles which have as consequences that a Good God would not under any circumstances cause or permit the evils in question". Reprinted as "Evil does not show that there is no God", in *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 600.

13. Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 330.

14. Elisha b. Abuye was the arch-heretic of rabbinic times, who in the sight of suffering said "there is neither judgment nor judge".

> antitheodic subjects acted as a warrant allowing post-Holocaust thinkers to voice their own doubts about God and suffering.[15]

For Braiterman, antitheodicy is the refusal to explain, justify, or give meaning to God's role amidst tragedy. "Antitheodicy mirrors theodicy in reverse…but it is not atheism… Rather than defend God or accept catastrophe, the authors of antitheodic statements justify human figures and reject suffering along with its rewards".[16] The term as employed by Braiterman and used by Roth and others takes a clear stance against traditional theodicy.

While one has to be careful advocating paradox,[17] I want to develop why a theodicy that incorporates select features of antitheodicy (in particular: a pastoral focus on the individual sufferer, a sustained grappling with the magnitude of some suffering along with a deep scepticism of theoretical justifications in the context of horrific suffering) will prevent religious believers from severing themselves from some of the valid tenets raised in the tradition of theodicy without seeming detached from the reality of atrocity. Does a Christian, for example, want to claim that God is completely transcendent and so utterly unknowable or is not a God of love and redemption? While maintaining key traditional beliefs, a stance sympathetic with elements of an antitheodicy may also ground and sharpen one's theological language by emphasising the need for nuance and for being more cognisant of horrendous evils (many theodic arguments will, therefore, simply, fail). This approach ensures that God will not be completely removed in an argument so crucial to anyone's faith: how to believe in a loving God despite evil. If one removes the idea of God from this argument and advocates the failure of all theodicy, one may as well remove God completely from the locus of one's thoughts and conceptions. While Phillips wants theism without theodicy, such theism still has evil and suffering hovering about it, and eventually, a type of theodicy emerges if traditional belief in God is maintained.

Moreover, if the focus turns to humanity as Braiterman seems to do,[18] then this attempt does nothing to solve the problem of evil. It only further idolises humanity – even if in the process humanity is degenerated as evil and the one to blame because

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15. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 163

16. Ibid., 37.

17. Steven Katz, writing of Irving Greenberg, remarks: "Merely holding, or claiming to believe, two contradictory propositions simultaneously is not a fruitful theological procedure" ["The Issue of Confirmation and Disconfirmation in Jewish Thought After the Shoah", in *The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology,* ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press), 2005, 50].

18. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 37.

they are at the centre without stating why they deserve to be. Recall how Sobrino advocated a theodic and anthropodic approach. Because antitheodicy is not necessarily atheism, one cannot say such evil exists because there is no God. Does humanity now have the intrinsic power to do anything? Braiterman is aware of these conflicts. In the heading, "Between Theodicy and Antitheodicy", he points out: "Theodicy and antitheodicy do not represent stable entities. Instead, they constitute interpretative boundaries between which religious discourse plays back and forth. To determine the actual theodic or antitheodic significance of a given statement requires semantic and temporal context".[19] In this instance, Braiterman offers caution to assign the label 'antitheodicy' to any ancient text.[20] While this caution is certainly understandable, what I take from Braiterman is the point that one may find tendencies for both paths in a particular discourse on the problem of evil. He illustrates this idea with a subheading in his analysis of Berkovits called: "Faith: Between Theodicy and Antitheodicy" in which he provides a thinker who works within these diametrically opposed points – faith as a paradox as noted above.[21] I will examine this idea below in my analysis of Berkovits's main themes.

III. Some Key Post-Holocaust Thinkers

This section will briefly examine the thought of a select group of six post-Holocaust Jewish thinkers whose theological probing and analysis raise fruitful challenges and approaches for any Christian theodicist. I will focus below on Braiterman's discussion[22] of Joseph Rubenstein, Eliezer Berkovits, and Emil Fackenheim while also adding analysis of Irving Greenberg, David Blumenthal, and Elie Wiesel.[23]

A. Richard Rubenstein and the Death of the Biblical God

Conservative Rabbi Richard Rubenstein was one of the first Jewish theologians to respond to Holocaust literature and virtually invented post-Holocaust theology with

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19. Ibid., 58.
20. Ibid., 59.
21. Ibid., 115.
22. In *(God) After* Auschwitz, Braiterman first analyses Martin Buber, Abraham Heschel, Joseph Soloveitchik, and Mordecai Kaplan to note not only how theodicy traditionally understood is barely present in these key figures (ibid., 80), but also to add how their insights could not be as developed due to the limited theological discourse of the Holocaust at the time of their writing. As Braiterman observes: "The Holocaust lay at the limit of interpretation for Buber, Heschel, Soloveitchik, and Kaplan. . .[They] simply lacked the historical, literary, and iconographic tools with which to grasp in full the Holocaust's impact on religious thought" (84). While examining these figures remains illuminating, I will restrict my discussion to some of the key Jewish thinkers of the following generation.
23. For my discussion of Ignaz Maybaum, see Chapter Three, footnote thirteen.

his publication of *After Auschwitz* in 1966.[24] It was Rubenstein who placed the Shoah as a central locus of investigation in his own theology, raising theological questions that remain unsolved. He writes: "After Auschwitz. . .events make a mockery of the construction of immanence as endowed with a meaning radiated by an affirmatively posited transcendence… There is no chance any more for death to come into the individual's life as somehow comfortable with the course of his life".[25] These comments are contingent upon a historical and religious view of Judaism that sees the Jewish people as chosen by God in covenantal partnership. So long as they remain faithful, God promises to love and care for God's people. The Holocaust, however, seemed to destroy any such interpretation of a loving, involved God and a covenant that remains viable and attractive.

In fact, in the first edition of *After Auschwitz,* Rubenstein backs what he calls "insightful paganism", emphasising a return to nature as a better grounding for one's faith and spiritual formation. In subsequent editions, though, he distances himself from the radical nature of this claim. What originally set the book apart and caused a minor uproar was a Jewish rabbi declaring the "death of God" and writing that the mass suffering and utter dehumanisation of the Holocaust destroys previous conceptions of a loving God who has an ultimate plan for each individual, and a covenant with Jewish people in particular. The potential for the Holocaust to be a part of God's plan is for Rubenstein an idea "simply too obscene" for him to accept.[26] As noted in Chapter Three, Ignaz Maybaum's attempt to argue that the third *churban* entailed 'progress' as it signified the end of the Jewish (and Christian) Middle Ages and that the innocent martyred in the Holocaust served as a vicarious sacrifice of atonement for the sins of others, problematically links God with mass atrocity and genocide. Instead, God should remain all that is the antithesis of the purpose and meaning of the Holocaust. For Rubenstein (and perhaps Maybaum on account of his explanations), either God has abandoned God's people or the Holocaust is a part of God's plan for them. For Rubenstein, the God that remains is not worth believing in and the covenant is longer operable. In short, as Steven Katz writes of Rubenstein's conclusions, "What worth there will be, will be of one's own creation. This radical thesis is not new, but it is original in a Jewish theological context".[27] The notion of a personal or communal relationship with God as grounded

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24. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 8.

25. Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 158.

26. Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 340.

27. Steven Katz, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish*

in the *Tanach* seems 'dead' and buried.

Despite the radical nature of this claim, Rubenstein does not consider himself an atheist. Regarding his infamous proclamation of the death of God, he clarifies:

> No man can really say that God is dead. How can we know that? Nevertheless, I am compelled to say that we live in the time of the 'death of God'. This is more a statement about man and his culture than about God. [It means] the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?[28]

While such a description of the world and God seems nihilistic, it does not explicitly say God does not exist as he clarifies that no human being would be able to prove that assertion. As I interpret this quote, if any faith in God remains, it is deist or one that must endure a powerless God. Ultimately Rubenstein is saying there is no way of knowing God because there is no conclusive means to argue from the events of this world to a loving, involved God. The God of the Bible and History was silent at Auschwitz. For Rubenstein, this fact speaks volumes. I remain unconvinced, though, that Rubenstein's clarification above does not, at least, imply God's death, as the failure to believe or argue in a Jewish context for the existence of the traditional biblical (and so good, covenantal) God comes very close to stating God is dead. Possibly, Rubenstein is not saying such a conclusion about God's goodness is definitively wrong; but asking how else a Jew can interpret these events without scepticism and doubt. As he writes in *The Cunning of History*: "We live in a world that is functionally godless".[29]

There is certainly reason to question whether Rubenstein weighs the evidence of counter-testimony to the Shoah as much as he cedes Auschwitz with a defining negation of the biblical God and covenant. As Steven Katz writes: "[I]t is clear that from a logical point of view it is methodologically improper to construct a phenomenology of historical reality that gives weight only to the negative significance of 'evil' without any attempt to balance it against the positive significance of 'good' we encounter in history".[30] Nevertheless, while Rubenstein's daring and blunt language strikes a chord and asks questions that still need answers,

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Thought (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 147.

28. Quoted from Roth and Rubenstein, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 343.

29. Quoted in Darrell Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 65.

30. Katz, "The Issue of Confirmation", 16.

other Jewish theologians, while painfully grappling with the reality of the Shoah, do not believe such devastation has the final word on their faith in God and the covenant. One of those theologians is Eliezer Berkovits.

B. Eliezer Berkovits: Amidst Those Whose Faith Was Forsaken and Those Whose Faith Burns Brightly

According to Braiterman, Orthodox Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, while seeing some validity in Rubenstein's questions and challenges, rebukes Rubenstein for using terms like the "death of God" (as opposed to Berkovits's use of the motif of "God's Hiding Face"[31]) and for addressing the Holocaust out of historical context.[32] For some of these reasons, Braiterman places Berkovits in stark contrast to Rubenstein, arguing that Berkovits "denied that the Holocaust posed any unique theological challenge to traditional belief and Jewish texts".[33]

This is true to a point. For Berkovits, there is no doubting that Auschwitz for his generation "represents the supreme crisis of faith"[34] and is unique in history because of the systematic nature of the slaughter, but not for the theological questions that arise from it. Berkovits sympathises with those who lost their faith in divine providence during the Holocaust because of what they themselves have suffered. He justifies their defiance and even calls it holy. However, in the nature of the faith crisis, he turns to a figure like Rabbi Akiba and what he had to endure – seeing vast similarities to his historical, theological crisis, especially after the failure of the Bar Kochba rebellion [132-135 CE]. Berkovits, therefore disagrees with Rubenstein, basically saying that if one can believe after the events of the destruction of the first temple in 586 BCE, why cannot one maintain elements of the traditional faith after Auschwitz?

While Berkovits is sympathetic to those who lost faith, he himself cannot accept their rebellion. As Braiterman writes: "To do so would mean that he must ignore those Jews whose faith survived intact. How dare he reject faith in Providence when they did not? And yet again how can he dare to believe in the face of those who refused?!"[35] In this light, Berkovits straddles a middle ground somewhere between theodicy and antitheodicy, although his faith, suffused at times

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31. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 126.
32. Ibid., 8.
33. Ibid., 8.
34. Eliezer Berkovits, "Faith After the Holocaust", in Eliezer Berkovits, *Essential Essays on Judaism,* ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2003), 316.
35. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 117.

with doubts, can also seem traditional in many of his writings. In his essay "Law and Morality in Jewish Tradition", we read: "The paradigm of all encounters is man's encounter with God. God meets the other with concern and care. The manner of God's involvement in the world is the eternal example of meeting the other".[36] However, in the midst of such pious statements is a faith battered by doubt and suffering, as we also hear: "One must approach the problem of faith presented in the crematoria in the agony of one's soul".[37] Such an approach gives no easy answers. For Braiterman, "This indeterminate position defines the theological reflections that appear throughout the remainder of [Berkovits's] *Faith After the Holocaust*". I would contend, however, that some gaps or indeterminate positions are essential for a theodicy to be viable in this post-Holocaust or postmodern (using Braiterman's term) world. Irving Greenberg will develop this idea below.

Moreover, while Braiterman believes that "Solidarity with the believers and the 'heretics' precludes coherence", Berkovits advocates that it is better to live at this threshold in the hope that from it a breakthrough can come.[38] It is a position similar to many of the liberation theologians who argue that one must look at reality openly and honestly even if such awareness can lead to legitimate and deep questions about God and humanity. From that difficult location, the hope remains that God will sustain an individual and will work to bring justice for all; that the reign of God is at hand and will continue to be implemented in our midst.[39] Remaining at this threshold, even while tempted and sympathetic to radical doubt, still leaves open the hope for redemption from God. In imagining the rabbis at prayer, praising God for preserving the faithful in history, Berkovits writes: "Yes, all these attributes of God in history are true; for if they are not true now, they will yet be true".[40] Here there is no blindness to the present failing on God's part, but neither is there all-consuming despair.

Braiterman also argues that Berkovits succeeds in revising Jewish tradition – through his strong misreading of it – while Rubenstein lacked "strength", as Harold Bloom employs the term. "For Bloom a strong misreading of tradition is one in which a young poet succeeds in forcing his precursors to speak in his own voice.

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36. Eliezer Berkovits ,"Law and Morality in Jewish Tradition", in *Essential Essays on Judaism,* 3.

37. Berkovits, "Faith After the Holocaust", 316.

38. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 117.

39. The Bible is full of the happy, surprising ending or the unorthodox saviour. In the Book of Judith, for example, the Jewish people are saved at the last moment through an unlikely source, but they are saved nonetheless.

40. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 129.

'The mighty dead return', Bloom writes, 'they return in our colors, and speaking in our voices'".[41] Braiterman argues that what makes these post-Holocaust Jewish theologians unique is how they attempt to revise tradition, seeking to forge new ground with mixed success. His argument is that the Holocaust raised questions that were similar, but never reached the extent and depth of previous generations, and this new context has required a deft and dynamic approach.

More traditionally according to Braiterman, a crucial component of Berkovits's hope is based on his advocacy of a 'free-will' theodicy with elements of soul-making. Steven Katz writes that for Berkovits, "God's hiddenness (the Biblical doctrine of *hester panim)* is required for man to be a moral creature".[42] In addition, many critics contend that Israel becomes for Berkovits a concrete testament and symbol for why it can be argued that despite Auschwitz, God is still active and involved with the Jewish people. For Braiterman, Berkovits's love of Israel equals or outweighs his love of God, and Israel becomes a "payment of the debt" owed to the Jews.[43] Steven Katz makes a similar assessment.[44] I should add that Berkovits believes a moral Israel can be a sign and symbol that God's covenant remains viable and he questions why Israel cannot be a sign of God's active love and involvement in history while Auschwitz is supposed to prove conclusively that God is no longer or never involved in history. He also stresses that the only way fully to practice being Jewish is through living in a land that is immersed in the Jewish way of life. This is encapsulated for him in the rabbinic notion that "there is no Torah like the Torah of the Land of Israel".[45] Thus, the Torah cannot be fully implemented and followed while living under another people with their set of laws and traditions.

One could agree in part with Braiterman's criticism of Berkovits in regard to Israel's role, but only if the context of why Israel matters for Berkovits is included. Israel is a means not an end. Faith in God is the ultimate concern. As Berkovits writes: "It is not our intention to justify God's ways with Israel. Our concern is whether the affirmations of faith may be made meaningfully, notwithstanding God's terrible silence during the Holocaust".[46] This does not mean one does not try to seek

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41. Ibid., 132-3. For Bloom's development on this theme writing about the role of Yeshua of Nazareth, Jesus Christ, and Yahweh see his *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (New York: Penguin, 2005). See in particular his chapter on Mark and his "persuasive misreading[s]" (64).
42. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Dialogues*, 270.
43. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 121.
44. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Dialogues*, 166-7.
45. Eliezer Berkovits, "The Spiritual Crisis in Israel", in *Essential Essays on Judaism,* 209.
46. Berkovits, "Faith after the Holocaust", 332

any answers. In advocating questioning or "wrestling"[47] with God, Berkovits acknowledges that "what faith is searching for is, if not to understand fully, at least to gain a hint of the nature of God's involvement".[48] Because such understanding is inevitably limited – as all honest theodicists recognise their limitations – the search is for a meaningful faith despite the contradictions, doubt, and caesuras. Again, Braiterman criticises such a position as "incoherent", but in order to remain within the context of the postmodern world that he also advocates, a world characterised by flux, uncertainty, and doubt, such a faith position may be the only meaningful and 'coherent' one remaining – especially when the believer seeks to look directly at evil and injustice.

Two aphorisms of Berkovits summarise his overall position: "Faith, because it is trust in God, demands justice of God"; and "The man of faith questions God because of his faith".[49] The answers that result are always fragmentary, but because they remain immersed in faith, they are honest, authentic, and religiously orthodox. Drawing upon a wide-range of philosophical, biblical, and rabbinic material, Berkovits also brings to these questions a refreshing historical and interdisciplinary focus. As Steven Katz observes, Berkovits is one of the few Jewish theologians who has "seen that the discussion of modern Jewish philosophy must be more than the history of ideas, that it must become at one and the same time more penetrating, more critical, more vital".[50] We will see the same tendency with Emil Fackenheim.

C. Emil Fackenheim and the Search for *Tikkun Olam*

The last theologian Braiterman concentrates on is Rabbi Emil Fackenheim, a survivor of the camps.[51] He is a religious thinker, who according to Braiterman, "stands at the midpoint of post-Holocaust Jewish theology having combined Richard Rubenstein's rhetoric of radicalism with Eliezer Berkovits's rhetoric of tradition".[52] Steven Katz claims: "Emil Fackenheim's reflections on the Holocaust are perhaps the most intriguing and I would offer a guess, the most influential, of all those that have been offered as a philosophical response to this overwhelming event in the

47. Ibid., 316.
48. Ibid., 316.
49. Ibid., 316.
50. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Dialogues*, 95.
51. Emil Fackenheim writes: "Of one thing I am sure: ask how God can let this happen to you – *to you personally* – and the danger is that you will end up feeling sorry for yourself; and once you give in to self-pity in Sachsenhausen – to say nothing of Auschwitz – you are finished" [*To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 218].
52. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 134.

recent history of European Jewry".[53] Like Greenberg (see below), Fackenheim emphasises human acts of *Tikkun* (mending, repair) to help "restore this broken Godhead to a state of primordial wholeness".[54]

In *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post Holocaust Thought*, Fackenheim argues that: "*The Tikkun which for the post-Holocaust Jew is a moral necessity is a possibility because during the Holocaust itself a Jewish Tikkun was already actual.* This simple but enormous, nay world-historical truth, is the rock on which rests any authentic Jewish future identity".[55] After bringing the reader to the utter depths of the Holocaust which would seem to deny any possibility to combat this "*novum* of inexhaustible horror",[56] Fackenheim locates the possibility for a Jewish future (whether secular or religious) because one can perceive this "ontological Ultimate – a *novum* of inexhaustible wonder" – in individuals like survivor Pelagia Lewinska, who identified the core of the Nazi logic while in the camps and was able to avoid succumbing to its humanity-destroying ideology. Fackenheim quotes Lewinska: "But from the instant that I grasped the motivating principle [of the Nazis to 'fill us with horror and contempt toward ourselves and our fellows']...it was as if I had been awakening from a dream.... I felt under orders to live. And if I did die in Auschwitz, it would be as a human being, I would hold onto my dignity".[57] While Lewinska does not cite the source for this order, for Fackenheim this is a "pivotal moment" as counter-testimony to the horror of Auschwitz, a possibility Rubenstein minimises or gainsays. It points to the possibility for healing, though never complete healing. Fackenheim comments: "...[W]e must accept from the start that at most only a fragmentary *Tikkun* is possible. This is because we are *situated* in the post-Holocaust world. We must accept our situatedness. We must live with it".[58]

For a Christian, the crucial phrase of the Our Father –"thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" – identifies the heart of this dilemma. While John Paul II and McCord Adams stress how Christ's life and resurrection provide complete redemption (or in Fackenheim's term, *Tikkun*), at issue is what it means to be "situated" in this post-Holocaust world but go beyond advocating a fragmentary

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53. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Dialogues*, 205.

54. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 144-5.

55. Fackenheim, T*o Mend the World*, 300. While Fackenheim believes the Holocaust was unique (xiv-xv), he is referring to the *Tikkun* as a world historical truth because it provides for all people an example of individuals who were able to fight and not "indiscriminately fall prey to the logic of Nazi destruction" (303).

56. Ibid., 301.

57. Quoted in ibid., 217. See Pelagia Lewinska, *Twenty Months at Auschwitz*, trans, A. Treichner (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1968).

58. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 256.

Tikkun. Also of import is whether acknowledging only fragmentary healing may be a more meaningful and spiritually satisfying claim than a "complete" one in light of the extent of atrocities in our world. One may also claim that a fragmentary *Tikkun* is possible in this world, but a complete one is only plausible in the afterlife. For Fackenheim, though, "we must *stay with* our singled-out, this-worldly anguish, and cannot escape from it".[59] Fackenheim's focus on this world is not a unique position within some strands of Judaism.

As George Robinson remarks: "...Jewish thought generally emphasises our actions in this world, *olam ha-*zeh, and not in the next, *olam ha-bah.* The one certain form of life after death is the deeds we do while we are here".[60] However, as Robinson also adds: "Contrary to popular misconceptions, Jewish thought does not reject the idea of life after death".[61] As I have noted, denying or minimising any afterlife redemption, whether in Phillips, Job, or Fackenheim, accentuates the tragedy and suffering of this world, which may be why the worldview presented by Rubenstein, above, or Blumenthal, below, may seem so bleak for the religious believer. While Fackenheim does not refute the relevance of making a commitment to transcendence,[62] he tries to elucidate how the Holocaust has altered one's hopes and perspectives: "... Yom Kippur *after* Auschwitz cannot be what *at* Auschwitz it

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59. Ibid., 330.

60. George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 193.

61. Ibid,, 192. Going into all the complexities and various positions of a Jewish conception of after-life is not possible here, but this is an important issue to at least touch upon. Let me quote Neil Gillman's introduction to his very concise and informative account of Judaic doctrines of death and the afterlife in *The Encyclopaedia of Judaism:* "Two independent doctrines of the afterlife for the individual emerged in Judaism, probably during the last two centuries B.C.E.: the doctrine of the resurrection of bodies and that of the immortality of souls. In time (probably the first century C.E.), these two doctrines became conflated so as to yield the theory that, at the end of days, God will resurrect dead bodies, rejoin them with their souls, which never died, and the individual human being, reconstituted as he or she existed on earth, will come before God in judgment.

"Various formulations of this conflated doctrine persisted until the dawn of the Jewish Enlightenment toward the close of the eighteenth century, when liberal thinkers began to perceive spiritual immortality to be more in tune with the temper of the age, and when the idea of bodily resurrection was rejected as primitive. In the last half of [the twentieth] century, this process has begun to be reversed, and the doctrine of bodily resurrection is being given serious reconsideration" [Neil Gillman, "Judaic Doctrines of Death and Afterlife", in *The Encylocopaedia of Judaism, Second Edition, Vol. 1, A-E,* eds. Jacob Neusner, Alan J. Avery-Peck, and William Scott Green (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 593]. One can get an idea why protest in particular would be such an important outlet for the Jew who denies the afterlife. Just as I noted with Phillips's rejection of the afterlife, the problem of theodicy becomes especially acute if there is no possibility for redemption or healing post-mortem for individuals crushed by suffering in this world. In a Jewish context, redemption in this world also depends upon which "dimension of Jewish eschatology" one refers to, as Neil Gillman notes (593), and whether the redemption of the Jewish people would include all individual Jews who ever existed.

62. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 322.

still was".[63] He refers to the martyrology *Ele Ezkera* in which ten rabbis defied the decree of Hadrian that forbade the practice of Judaism. For this rebellion, the Roman soldiers tortured the rabbis to death. "Then the angels in heaven cried out, 'Is this the Torah, and this the reward?' And a voice from heaven replied, 'If I hear another word, I will turn the world to water'. The voice went on: 'This is my decree: accept it, all you who love the Torah!'"[64]

Fackenheim marvels how such words can be cited during the Yom Kippur Mussaf liturgy today, as the prospect of martyrdom for the likes of Rabbi Akiba were not possible for many of the victims of the Holocaust. He writes: "For the children, the mothers, the *Muselmänner* had not chosen to be martyrs: and that God needs *that* death is unacceptable. Hence, even the most devout Jew at prayer today musk ask, on the holiest day of Judaism: why is the world today not water? He must ask the question but he cannot answer it".[65] It is interesting that Fackenheim raises the question of why there is still something but not nothing and yet decrees that one should not answer the question. Is it because to justify the world would be to justify some of the horrors, or that in light of such horrors, only a world of water is just?

Fackenheim shares with Jon Sobrino a mixture of an honest assessment of reality, a commitment to praxis, and hope for the future, though one focused solely on this world. According to Steven Katz, Fackenheim "has tried to find a way to avoid both the absolute faith of the pious who do not see any special problem in the *Shoah* and those like Rubenstein who argue that the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn from Auschwitz is the 'death of God' and the ultimate absurdity of history".[66] In *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim, like Berkovits, admits one is pulled by one's fidelity to those victims like the *Muselmänner* which seems to preclude the possibility for a *Tikkun* while also refusing to forget those who were able to resist which obligates "our *Tikkun*". Thus, post-Holocaust thought "must dwell, however painful and precariously, between the extremes, and seek a *Tikkun* as it endures the tension".[67] One means to inhabit this tension is through theological protest.

For Fackenheim, such theological protest is seen as an important and expected theological response in the face of such affliction and is emblematic of the Jewish faith. He writes: "There is a kind of faith which will accept all things and renounce every protest. There is also a kind of protest that has despaired of faith. In Judaism

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63. Ibid., 322.
64. Ibid., 329.
65. Ibid., 329.
66. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Dialogues*, 150.
67. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 310.

there has always been protest which stays within the spheres of faith".[68] After citing various biblical precedents, he adds:

> in modern times, the Hasidic Rabbi Levi Yithak of Berdiczev once interrupted the sacred Yom Kippur service in order to protest that, whereas kings of flesh and blood protected their peoples, Israel was left unprotected by her King in heaven. Yet having made his protest, he recited the Kadish, which begins with these words, 'Extolled and hallowed be the name of God throughout the world…'[69]

Fackenheim, according to Katz, "is adamant in his refusal to allow any theological *explanation* of the Holocaust…Yet, despite the implications, despite the absolute failure of theodicy, despite the seeming absurdity, Fackenheim urges men to believe".[70]

This stance is most evident in his famous 614th commandment, formulated in 1967, in which the Jewish people must believe so as not to give Hitler posthumous victories. Richard Rubenstein and John Roth, while noting the religious and existential problems of the commandment, refer to it as "a cry of the heart transmuted into the language of the sacred".[71] Like Pascal's wager, it has an emotive energy which begins to fizzle when examined more closely. Despite its flaws, however, it remains rhetorically potent and effective.

The first criterion of the commandment is that "Jews are bidden to survive, even if unable to believe in a 'higher' purpose'". Reflecting on these points some thirty years later, Fackenheim acknowledges the criticism that so-called mere survival may not seem enough to constitute Judaism, but asserts: "*In a world that often seems on the verge of despair, is not this Jewish testimony, more perhaps than any mitzvah that Jews are bidden to perform, what makes them a light unto the nations?*"[72] Jews testify within their tradition to their God intervening to save God's people, and yet they now live in the site of "the most radical attack ever on the divine image in humanity. [At the least,] Jews are called to rebuild the belief that humanity – every member of it – is created in the Divine image".[73] Legitimate issues

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68. Quoted from Darryl Fasching, "Ethics After Auschwitz and Hiroshima", in *The Genocidal Temptation: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda, and Beyond*, ed. Robert S Frey (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 17.

69. Quoted in Ibid., 17.

70. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Dialogues*, 151.

71. Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 350.

72. Emil Fackenheim, "The 614th Commandment Reconsidered", in *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Michael l. Morgan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 193-4.

73. Ibid., 194.

remain about the lack of dynamism and growth in such an anaemic faith, but through acts of healing and mending, one may very likely encounter the presence of God through restoring the brokenness of our world.

There has been much debate about the naming of the "614th Commandment" if no one actually heard God's voice. As Steven Katz also reminds us, "...the God of Biblical faith is *both* a commanding and a saving God....Fackenheim has made much of the commanding presence of Auschwitz, but where is the saving God of the Exodus?"[74]

Painfully aware of these two facets, Fackenheim has accentuated the role of Israel as part of that saving presence of God. He writes in the "Acknowledgement" of *To Mend the World*:

> How does a Jew think of future Jewish thought? Of future thought? Of mending the world? I confess that all this would be for me humanly impossible were it not for the reality that is Israel – the state, the land, the language, the people.[75]

Richard Rubenstein and John Roth, understanding why Fackenheim would give such moral significance to Israel, nevertheless opine that he "may have overloaded" Israel's significance.[76] Braiterman believes that Fackenheim is blinded by equivocating the State of Israel without "the same ambiguity, the same rupture and fragmentation, with which he meets God and Torah".[77] They also note how God becomes a nominal figure in Fackenheim's later discussion of evil and suffering.[78]

Fackenheim, however, asserts that the 614th commandment was often misunderstood, or even distorted.[79] Looking at the tragedies of 70 CE and 1492 CE, he acknowledges how sufficient time had to elapse before the full truth of those events could be faced. Believing the Holocaust "is a far more devastating catastrophe than these other two", he acknowledges that waiting is not a possibility. In the second preface of *To Mend the World*, he quotes Rabbi Tarfon: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work. But you are not free to avoid it".[80] Just as Steven Katz praises Fackenheim for his "ability to incorporate radical negativity into

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74. Katz, "The Issue of Confirmation", 23.

75. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, ix.

76. Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, 351. Fackenheim does write: "On their part, others may wish to raise 'Israel' to the same preworldly, post-worldly universality the Jewish tradition already ascribes to 'God' and 'Torah.' But heir to the *kedoshim*, to the 'holy ones', the flesh-and-blood Israel cannot rise, or wish to rise, above a heritage that is itself holy" (*To Mend the World*, 330).

77. Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz*, 160.

78. Ibid., 156.

79. Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, xix.

overarching religious commitments", so too are his reflections, particularly on the 614th commandment, a valuable means to approach some of the key problems raised in response to the Holocaust. They are not, of course, the final word; nor are they meant to be. Despite its flaws, Fackenheim "remains with the 614th commandment" some thirty years later as it is still an important impetus for dialogue and analysis.[81] Our next thinker, like Fackenheim, also knows the problem of the Holocaust cannot be avoided, but the faith he espouses, though "broken" in some ways, still aims to be more dynamic and living.

D. Irving Greenberg: Seeking 'Credible' Theological Statements

Orthodox Rabbi Irving Greenberg, closely resembling the praxic-approach of liberation theologians, argues that especially after Auschwitz, one must perform "acts of love and life giving" that "reaffirm meaningfulness, worth, and life".[82] Braiterman does not include Greenberg in part because his focus on praxis was similar to Berkovits,[83] but as Steven Katz writes: "Greenberg's reconstruction of Jewish Theology after the Holocaust…presents a fascinating, creative reaction to the unprecedented evil manifest in the death camps".[84]

I have already noted how Greenberg's working principle – "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children"[85] – is often invoked and alluded to in many texts dealing with the Holocaust.[86] In Chapter Five, I also clarified McCord Adams's critique of it.[87] While Steven Katz has correctly pointed out some of the problems of the creed -- – particularly with the word "credible" – as what is credible is so dependent upon subjectivity[88] – it still retains rhetorical and moral force, though further clarifications are needed by looking at the principle in its original context and at some of Greenberg's subsequent works.

In his essay "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and

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80. Ibid., 30.
81. Ibid., xx.
82. Irving Greenberg "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 514.
83. Braiterman, *(God) After* Auschwitz, 13.
84. Steven T. Katz, "Introduction" [to "Part Three: European and American Responses During and Following the War"], 363.
85. Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke", 506.
86. See Chapter One.
87. See Chapter Five.
88. Katz, "The Issue of Confirmation", 51-2.

Modernity after the Holocaust", Greenberg seems to focus on the moment of suffering when he refers to this principle, although I interpret it as a reminder that all theological (or any type of) statements are made in the presence of victims of horrendous slaughter and suffering, no matter where that theologian (or individual) is actually situated. It is also stressing that to say anything is secondary; first one must reach into the pit and pull the children out.

Though the burning babies are the intended 'audience' in the "working principle", the example Greenberg uses after introducing it in the text is of Sarah, a young girl Wiesel describes in *Night*. According to Wiesel, Sarah is forced into prostitution to save herself during the Holocaust and later offers herself for free to a young, Jewish survivor of the camps. Here, traditional moral concepts and normative religious claims conflict (or are in a dialectic relationship with) these "new revelatory events".[89] In other words, what once was outright wrong is not clearly so in this context. Amidst a world that formed and sought completely to adulterate her, Sarah survives and "retains enough feeling to offer herself to a shy, survivor boy".[90] The old language deems it 'adultery' and 'sin' and yet such an act from such a person in such a world also reveals goodness and healing and reaching out to the other.

To recognise the development of this "working principle", it is worth repeating here the quote from Greenberg's essay "New Revelations and New Patterns":

> The Talmud tells us that after the Destruction, God's might is shone in divine restraint from violating human freedom by intervening and preventing the evil, but divine awesomeness is shown in that the people of God still exist. This revelation summons humankind to secularity, to create and rehabilitate the divine image in a human community. This is the ultimate testimony – perhaps the only credible one – that can speak of God in a world of burning children. And it summons humans to co-responsibility with God that this fragile redemption be preserved and nourished.[91]

For Greenberg, after Auschwitz we can only speak of "moment faiths", instances when a vision of redemption is present, interspersed with the "flames and the smoke of burning children". At the same time, meaningful actions are still possible, and in

89. Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke", 506.
90. Ibid., 506.
91. Irving Greenberg, New Revelations and New Patterns", in Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth, The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 137.

many ways are extended to a wide variety of mundane and heroic acts: whatever aims to reflect the goodness and love of God. Here Greenberg's focus shares many similarities with Sobrino's primordial holiness, acts that respond to God's calling to give and foster life.

Also note that the emphasis on human responsibility does not mean God is absent; and yet, understandable doubts and questions persist, as God's role in our daily lives seems drastically minimised. This precarious position between faith and doubt and hope and despair may be the best lens through which to form any theodicy, though such a dialectic produces a faith that is no longer whole. "After Auschwitz", Greenberg writes, "there is no faith so whole as a faith shattered – and re-fused – in the ovens".[92] The imagery and rhetoric with Greenberg is always striking but he is expressing how faith can still be possible amidst such horrific instances of suffering, though it is unclear to me how faith can still be viable after being 'placed' in the ovens. Of this hellish process, Filip Müller writes: "Once the pits had been emptied and the ash taken to the ash depot, they were piled up in man-high heaps. However, in these heaps there were many limbs and other parts of bodies not completely burnt".[93] These body parts were "fished out" and then burnt in a separate fire. Müller continues: "The rest of the ashes were then pulverised on the concrete slab…by first being pounded and then passed through different-meshed sieves". He then adds that in the early stages of this system, pits had to be dug for the ashes though they were later removed in trucks. Nothing remains of the original human person. Applying his metaphor, what is left of one's faith? One could refer to the smoke which rose from the crematoria, but how far does one want to extend the jarring conceit?

Ultimately, Greenberg's focus is a pragmatic response to evil, though he adds: "moral necessity requires the search for religious experience rather than surrender to the immediate logic of nonbelief".[94] This search culminates in acts of *chesed* – loving kindness – that seek "to create an object of its love, that sees that life and love can overcome the present reality".[95] He claims "human testimony" is the one "fundamental testimony that can still be given"[96] which is linked to an act that "recreate[s] the image of God". There remains, however, a tension or paradox that

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92. Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke", 507.

93. Filip Muller, "*Eyewitness to Auschwitz": Ten Years in the Gas Chambers*, trans. Susanne
Flatauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 139.

94. Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke", 511.

95. Ibid., 515.

96. Ibid., 514.

needs further clarification.

At various points Greenberg contends that "words are useless", or in one of his often-quoted passages: "to talk of love and of a God who cares in the presence of burning children is obscene and incredible; to leap in and pull a child out of the pit…is to make … the only statement that counts".[97] I examined the core of this issue with McCord Adams's argument that contra Greenberg, there are some statements that victims may need to hear after their ordeals that would not be permissible in the presence of the burning children. [98] Is Greenberg saying all words at any time are useless, or only in the presence of burning children? As noted in Chapter Five, I see this principle as one that theodicists need to face though bearing in mind the specific audience and context they are working within. Babies cannot understand a theodicy, but a theodicist may need to speak for the most vulnerable, the voiceless who are unable to speak for themselves. Babies burnt to death are a classic case of this reality. Theodicists must also be aware of the Sarahs of our world, whose moral framework and conceptions are formed in utter opposition to a "traditional" theodicist. I have also pointed out that theodic discussion has also occurred in the midst of atrocities.[99] In Greenberg's defence, he calls his formulation a "working principle" which implies it must be adjusted depending on circumstance. It is not applicable to all victims in all situations. As I have noted in Chapter Five, some victims look back on their horrific experiences and are grateful for their religious conversions. They bless their horrors with words.

Moreover, in examining the concept of the option for the poor, I quoted Stephen Pope who correctly states that: "Concrete actions in the cause of justice for the poor are ultimately more important than theories about those actions, but the former nonetheless require interpretation and moral language for deciphering their theological supports, conceptual meaning, and socio-ethical implications".[100] When Greenberg refers to "religious experience", words will be needed to clarify what is good or religious and why certain actions need to be performed or condemned. Bereft of a context or meaning, any action becomes difficult to differentiate and evaluate. Such a process is what enables Greenberg to cite the prostitute Sarah's

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97. Ibid., 514

98. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 88.

99. Darrell J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 57. Fasching writes: "It is a lived faith, a tradition of faith reaffirmed in the very bowels of the death camps".

100. Stephen L. Pope, "Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor", *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 271.

actions as one of "suffering sainthood".[101] Not all words are obscene in the presence of "burning babies".

In "Toward an Organic Model of the Relationship", Greenberg writes that the real question is not "where was God during the Holocaust … The real question is: What was God's message when God did not stop the Holocaust? God is calling humans to take full responsibility for the achievement of the covenant. It is their obligation to take up arms against evil and to stop it".[102] Against Rubenstein, Greenberg is stating that the covenant is evolving which calls for humanity to take more responsibility while never forgetting "that the human is not God. The human is like God, but is ultimately called by God to be the partner".[103] Greenberg thus finds a way to maintain continuity with the core beliefs of the Jewish faith tradition while forging a dynamic, organic theology that strives to address our contemporary situation.[104] His working principle is only one small facet of his reflections on suffering and evil.

To repeat: theodicies are meant to be reflected and prayed upon. Babies are not yet capable of this, though their suffering must be carefully considered when formulating theodic statements. And burning babies are being murdered. If one is talking and can save a human being, then talking is "obscene and incredible". But our cognisance of such atrocities should challenge, clarify, and purify our theodic concepts and language. Remember that Greenberg still wrote essays and books after stating this "working principle". It was a challenge and an aim: the goal of which was to be sure one kept in mind these victims and did not wound them with words. This is a necessary reminder, but words can also mend. They can provide hope, solace, and healing. A theodicy, at its best, has these intentions. If silence is all that is ever heard, then the goodness that is practiced and witnessed, even in acts like Sarah's which can be morally impenetrable for some, remains smothered, and distinctions of what is moral and immoral or which act restores or sullies the image of God are lost. Lastly, not all theodic responses are morally equivalent. Some responses, like the tradition of *privatio boni*, with clarifications, can still be held, while the for-our-sins we are punished mantra cannot. Silence in this context negates everything with equal uselessness or obscenity. To maintain some sense of one's religious continuity and tradition, all of these theodic responses cannot simply be

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101. Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke", 506.

102. Irving Greenberg, "Toward an Organic Model of the Relationship", in *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth*, 159.

103. Ibid., 159.

104. For a contrasting interpretation, see Katz, "Introduction [to Part Three]", 361.

discarded without major ramifications.

Our next theologian, unlike Greenberg but similar to Rubenstein, seems to break with that tradition of continuity, although his overall aim is to leave open the possibility for a relationship with God despite the pervasive loss and destruction of the Holocaust.

E. David Blumenthal's Abusive God

David Blumenthal in many ways takes the main points found in Laytner and Braiterman and carries them as far as his mind and faith permit. I turn to Blumenthal because his thoughts are provocative and because I am using them to support my argument that one cannot be a theodic-agnostic (but must weigh in and decide on this issue for a viable faith).

In *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest*, Blumenthal investigates victims of child abuse and victims of the Holocaust, and "draws from Job and Wiesel to suggest that a theology of protest and suspicion coupled with the religious affectations of distrust and challenge is the proper post-Holocaust abuse-sensitive theological stance".[105] Blumenthal sees God as an abusive parent who can still be loved only after the victim recognises his justifiable anger, hurt, and disappointment with God. No longer can believers blindly accept God's actions and decrees. No longer is God beyond our doubt and questioning. Death of God theology takes up these stances to suggest, as Richard Rubenstein writes, that such positions "face more openly than any other contemporary theological movement the truth of the divine human encounter in our times".[106]

In seeking a Jewish response to the Holocaust, Blumenthal notes that "the idea that God is an abuser is new in terminology but it is an old idea".[107] He asks:

> If one is religious, if 'God' means something to you, who is to blame? If one has lived a life in which God's presence is felt, if religious ritual has been an important part of your spiritual life, who is to blame?... Most religious folk, and most religious thinkers...do not want to answer this question. ... They do not want to contemplate, not even to think about, how God might be responsible for the Shoah.[108]

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105. David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), xxi.

106. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, 250.

107. David Blumenthal, "Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Icons of Our Century", in *The Genocidal Temptation,* 252.

108. David Blumenthal, "Despair and Hope in Post-Shoah Jewish Life", in *The Genocidal Temptation*, 178.

He calls for praxis and not theology and mentions how atheists and heretics grapple with this same question but still strive to make the world better. He argues that we must take a clear stance "...if God is integral to who [we] are".[109] This stance is rooted in the Bible as he turns to stories like Abraham protesting God's intended destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Blumenthal continues: "In the end, Abraham loses the argument, but his reaction is the correct one: not to deny God, not to deny God's power or right to act, but to protest God's *judgment*".[110]

Blumenthal's strong biblical foundation and direct approach are rhetorically effective. In a similarly provocative vein, Simone Weil has written: "If God had not been humiliated, in the person of Christ, he would be inferior to us".[111] From a religiously-orthodox standpoint, both Weil's comment and Blumenthal's position should be rebuked. And yet, in the context of mass atrocity – and according to McCord Adams, John Paul II, Sobrino, and Gutiérrez – Christ is said to be the key and answer to the problem of evil. On the one hand, a Christian, ultimately, needs to examine theodicy from a Trinitarian standpoint, thus not overlooking the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity and the relational (and outpouring) love that is antithetical to the reality of evil. And yet, there is something rhetorically and theologically comforting in the notion that God, as incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, had to endure – and succumbed (at least initially) to violence and injustice in this world. It can be reassuring to examine the life of Christ in the Gospels (which reflects, in so many ways, the calling for mercy and justice in the Hebrew Bible), and so be in a position to claim that God has incontrovertibly intervened, has chosen, has entered intimately into solidarity with the marginalised, the poor, and the voiceless. And yet, Weil's comment overstates her case.

Blumenthal makes a similar, but no less, faith-filled error. While Blumenthal's advocating of protest has been recommended throughout this work, his contention that it is the only viable response is debatable, and from a faith standpoint, problematic. One protests because of faith and hope, as Berkovits has argued. Protest is senseless wailing if God is abusive because the hope is so contingent upon God's state when the protest or prayer is uttered. Such a God

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109. Ibid., 178.

110. David Blumenthal, "Cross-Disciplinary Notes: Four Questions for Teaching the Shoah", in *Testimony, Tensions, and Tikkun: Teaching the Holocaust in Colleges and Universities*, eds. Myrna Goldenberg and Rochelle L. Millen (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 165.

111. Simone Weil, "The Father's Silence" in *The Simone Weil Reader*, ed. George A. Panichas (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1977), 436.

may help or may make matters worse. Protest seems fruitless with such a view of God because at some point the logical issue is to refrain from protesting since it serves no purpose, and so all connection with this fickle, abusive God fizzles altogether. It is understandable to fear that redemption and healing are not possible or are false projections of our desires; and if so, then perhaps one can claim God is abusive. But without knowing what will happen beyond this world, no final verdict is possible.

Blumenthal laments that more people do not join him in his stand though he feels it is the only one he can make to face God and do his duty.[112] He notes that anger causes theological despair in response to fundamentalist orthodox positions that blame the Shoah on our sins. Many hear this and have little response except to say there is no more covenant.[113] Echoing Rubenstein, he believes Jewish assimilation is a result of this theological despair for how could a Jewish person still maintain belief in the God of the covenant and the Bible?[114] And he too feels this state of theological despair – "a doubting of the One Who lends meaning to that history". One could say this sign of doubt is more radical than his stand to accuse God of being abusive because an abusive God may be good and loving, an utterly absent one cannot. In the end he believes the only answer is theological protest as a "first step". His faith position is a tenuous one, but persistence is his focus: "I am not sure I hope, but I persist in the face of despair".[115] As noted with the law court pattern of prayer, after accusation, one ends with a petition of trust and hope. Blumenthal is still awaiting an answer, though he perseveres. But what if, as McCord Adams and others argue, God is under no obligation to redeem evil and injustice? Would God be abusive if there were no afterlife for healing and redemption? I will address this issue in the next chapter, but Blumenthal's radical statement – like Weil's – cannot be dismissed too easily.

Moreover, from Nomberg-Przytyk or Partnoy's perspective, Blumenthal's position may be the most honest and revealing. For a traditional believer, however, the idea that God could be both loving and abusive would seem too remote from traditional religious conceptions. For Christians, it would seem infinitesimally removed from the God Jesus calls "Abba". But again, Blumenthal's questions, while radical, are challenging, and paradoxically, faithful. It would seem easier for Blumenthal to reach this point and renounce

112. Blumenthal, "Auschwitz and Hiroshima", 178.
113. Ibid., 180.
114. Ibid., 181.

God. But he perseveres.

A similar perseverance is embodied by my last Jewish thinker, whom many see as a living symbol of an individual who has maintained faith in God despite horrific atrocity.

F. Elie Wiesel, Unending Sea[116]

Anson Latyner writes that "Wiesel's experiences of theodicy during the Holocaust is exactly the problem that perplexes so many post-Holocaust Jews still. . . For Wiesel, the centuries of suffering, culminating in the Holocaust present an overwhelming obstacle of faith in the traditional sense. . . the smoke of Auschwitz has obscured the view of Sinai. [While] Sinai remains, so too does the cloud that envelops it".[117] This conflict is brimming throughout Wiesel's works of non-fiction and fiction, a few of which I will touch upon here.

In Wiesel's *Night*, we have a poignant display of rebellion by a believer who loves God passionately, and for whom, to love God is to live. When Moishe the Beadle questions why the young Wiesel cries when he prays, he can only think: "Why did I pray? Strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?"[118] He learns early on from Moishe a valuable lesson:

> Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him...therein lies true dialogue. Man asks and God replies. But we don't understand His replies. We cannot understand them. Because they dwell in the depths of our souls and remain there until we die. The real answers, Eliezer, you will find only within yourself.[119]

While the language is mystical and raises more questions than answers, it may also cut to the heart of a theodicy. Nevertheless, these thoughts plague Wiesel during the Holocaust and beyond. Throughout *Night*, the endless question of the whereabouts of God echoes within Eliezer and the other prisoners' thoughts and hearts. "It's over", Akiba Drumer tells Wiesel, "God is no longer with us." Then regretting his

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115. Ibid., 183.

116. I had the pleasure of taking a course of Elie Wiesel's at Boston University while I was a graduate theology student at Boston College. I sat for those two hours every week writing down almost everything he said. I was utterly amazed that this kind, soft-spoken man was one and the same with the figure who had seen – actually seen and heard and smelled – the children of Auschwitz burning, and yet as he writes, somehow remained sane, let alone a theist. I could not begin to reflect that what I read with horror, he lived amidst horror. My experience with Wiesel will inevitably sway and prejudice everything I have to say – and not say – about theodicy.

117. Anson Laytner, *Arguing with God: A Jewish Tradition* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1990), 216.

118. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (London: Penguin, 2006), 5.

119. Ibid., 5.

words, Akiba tries to mention man's insignificance, but he remains angry: "Where is God's mercy? Where's God? How can I believe, how can anyone believe in this God of mercy?"[120]

After a prisoner is hung, Wiesel again hears the question, like a refrain: "For God's sake, where is God?" He writes: "And from within me, I heard a voice answer. 'Where He is? This is where – hanging here from this gallows…' That night the soup tasted of corpses".[121] Sadly, the same 'taste' seems to dominate most theodic attempts, as the sheer magnitude of murder and torture seems to overwhelm all one's senses and faith. Amidst all the putrefaction and decay of humanity, how could Wiesel not begin to feel God was curling through the chimney as well? He asks:

> What are You, my God? I thought angrily. How do you compare to this stricken mass gathered to affirm to You their faith, their anger, their defiance? What does Your grandeur mean, Master of the Universe, in the face of all this cowardice, this decay, and this misery? Why do you go on troubling these poor people's wounded minds, their ailing bodies?[122]

The faith of the stricken mass, still striving to care about God, seems more honourable than God. Note also how Wiesel's last "you" in reference to God is lowercase, as if the diminished status of "You" seems to reflect Wiesel's diminished respect for God in his heart. Here, poignantly, it is not just the thought of God's demise that torments people, but the constantly reoccurring voice of doubt and hope in God, as if the human mind is never completely willing to extricate God for once and forever. Yet, as Wiesel comments, the torment is too cruel. During a service in which the liturgical verses praise God, Wiesel cannot help but protest and question:

> Why, but why should I bless him? Every fiber in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves? Because He kept six crematoria working day and night, including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in His great might, He created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna…?"[123]

This rebellion had a price for Wiesel. "I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes had opened and I was alone, terribly alone in a world without God, without man. Without love or mercy".[124] This "great void"[125] seemed to be finalised in Wiesel's

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120. Ibid., 76-7.
121. Ibid., 65.
122. Ibid., 66.
123. Ibid., 67.
124. Ibid., 68.

last explicit comment about God in *Night*: "And in spite of myself, a prayer formed inside me, a prayer to this God in whom I no longer believed".[126]

While God is absent from the rest of the text, the death of his father also seems to imply the death of God. In the "Preface to the New Translation", Wiesel includes the harrowing scene of how his dying father was calling out his name, pleading for Wiesel to hear his last words, while the SS guards were pummelling his father to death. Wiesel writes:

> Instead of sacrificing my miserable life and rushing to his side, taking his hand, reassuring him, showing him that he was not abandoned, that I was near him, that I felt his sorrow, instead of all that, I remained flat on my back, asking God to make my father stop calling my name, to make him stop crying. So afraid was I to incur the SS wrath.[127]

To this day, Wiesel blames himself for not comforting his father during his last moments: "His last word had been my name. A summons. And I had not responded".[128] And yet, one can say, all his life has since been one long response to his father's call.

Throughout his life, Wiesel has been a pre-eminent example of an individual who still believes in God after Auschwitz. In *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, Wiesel testifies: "if Nietzsche could cry out to the old man in the forest that God is dead, the Jew in me cannot".[129] It is a profound faith, a faith that clings to him in spite of himself, a shadow that is a part of him and cannot be sundered. Still, his faith – his struggle with God – has never ceased. He states he will never understand God's role amidst Auschwitz[130] and questions whether contemplating God's sadness "helps us bear our grief, or simply augments the weight".[131] He adds: "Perhaps God shed more tears in the time of Treblinka, Majdanek, and Auschwitz, and one may therefore invoke His name not only with indignation but also with sadness and compassion".[132]

According to Laytner, "Wiesel's God remains a caring God. Yet Wiesel's vision – his recreation and revival of the anthropopathetic God – is tempered by the

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125. Ibid., 69.
126. Ibid., 91.
127. Ibid., xi.
128. Ibid., xii.
129. Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs, 1969* -, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 84.
130. Ibid., 105.
131. Ibid., 104.
132. Ibid., 85.

reality of the Holocaust".[133] Like Berkovits, Wiesel finds himself straddling two different, and often, contradictory realms. While McCord Adams believes God will be able to convince every individual of God's overall goodness and value of each person's life, Wiesel notes: "Perhaps, some day someone will explain how, on the level of man, Auschwitz was possible, but on the level of God, it will forever remain the most disturbing of mysteries".[134] Here, it seems, no matter how creative or imaginative God's answer, it will not be sufficient.

While Wiesel still shows remarkable compassion for a God who loves us so much while we commit so much evil, Berish, one of the characters in Elie Wiesel's play *The Trial of God* remarks: "If I am given the choice of feeling sorry for Him or for human beings, I choose the latter anytime. He is big enough, strong enough to take care of Himself; man is not".[135] As Laytner adds: "Over and over again, Wiesel advocates faithful defiance as the post-Holocaust expression of a Jew's relationship with God".[136]

We can see this tendency in his often retold conversation with Rebbe Menahem Mendel Schneersohn: "'Rebbe,' [Wiesel] asked, 'how can you believe in God after Auschwitz?' He looked at [Wiesel] in silence for a long moment, his hands resting on the table. Then he replied in a soft, barely audible voice: 'How can you not believe in God after Auschwitz?'"[137] Ultimately, Wiesel's message resonates with hope and faith amidst the (necessary) accusations and rebellion, a tension he lives with and can find no other path to avoid. This struggle culminates in an extant, but wounded faith. As Irving Greenberg adds: "if faith be wounded in the process, let it be recognized that after the Holocaust no faith is so whole as a broken faith".[138] Despite the fissures, the doubts, and moments of recrimination, Wiesel similarly remarks:

> I would be within my rights to give it up. I could invoke six million reasons to justify my decision, but I don't. I am incapable of straying from the path chartered by my ancestors. Without this faith in God, the faith of my fathers and forefathers, my faith in Israel and in humanity would be diminished. And so I choose to preserve the faith of my childhood. I never

133. Laytner, *Arguing with God*, 217.

134. Quoted from ibid., 217.

135. Quoted from John Roth, "Response", in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 14.

136. Laytner, *Arguing With God*, 222.

137. Wiesel, *All Rivers*, 405.

138. Irving Greenberg, as quoted in Alice and Roy Eckhardt, *Long Day's Journey Into Night: A Revised Retrospective on the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988),

> gave up my faith in God even over there. I went on praying. Yes, my faith was wounded and still is today. . .but it is because I still believe in God that I argue with him.[139]

Fackenheim looks to Lewinska as counter-testimony while Sobrino looks to Romero and the lives of the poor. I often look to Wiesel. The point is that despite the gaps and the fissures that evil and suffering unleash, despite a faith that is wounded, or fractured, one need not automatically cede these horrific events the final word; nor can a believer in God allow such atrocities to monopolise all testimony that speaks of the goodness of others and of God's presence. But a choice must be made: theodic-agnosticism or positing the "end of theodicy" is not ultimately viable if one wants to speak of a relationship with God. Wiesel and others struggle: doubt is never too far removed from belief, but their stance is clear.

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139. Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full. Memoirs 1969 - ,* trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 70.

Assessment of Section Three

Because Jewish post-Holocaust thought is written within a rich tradition of thousands of years amidst the spectre of the Shoah, many of its authors inevitably present ideas and dogma both challenging and spiritually-sensitive. Through Anson Laytner's work, we have seen how theological protest is not only possible within a faith tradition, but is essential for a religious tradition to confront the evils of this world and those within its own specific history.

Zachary Braiterman's text is useful for his argument on the similarities and shared-conceptual space between postmodernity and post-Holocaust Jewish theology. For my context, the theodicist is confronted with historical caesuras, theoretical gaps and fissures, and a radical doubt in some circles that challenges any stable sense of truth, identity, morality, or the good. I also agree that antitheodic elements must be included in any theodic attempt. My calling for all theodicists to integrate comprehensively the testimonies of mass atrocity within their theological and theodic discourse is a means to prevent a theodicy from "defending the indefensible" as Braiterman and others fear.[1]

I concur with Eliezer Berkovits that a theodicist needs to be faithful both to those who maintained their beliefs while in the camps and those who could no longer believe. I also agree that one questions God because of one's faith in God. Theological protest would not be "theological" if there is no relationship with God.

Emil Fackenheim's 614th commandment is also applicable for my context because it provides an outlook or perspective to challenge the desire to renounce one's faith. It causes one to rethink one's position, which may encourage further reflection, and perhaps, commitment to God, or the search for God. Here the consequences of one's choice to remain committed to one's faith is not isolated and unconnected to other human beings. Moreover, while I would not limit the possibility for *Tikkun* to this world, I agree with Fackenheim that there is counter-testimony to the aims of the Holocaust. Such a truth can provide hope to believe in God and God's presence in this world as human beings made in the image of God reflect (no matter how limited) the goodness and holiness of God.

Irving Greenberg's working principle has caused many theologians to stop and ponder, perplexed as to what can be said in the presence of the burning children and what, if anything, can be said after the occurrence of such suffering. I addressed my concerns with the principle in Chapter Nine, but I believe the principle is important

because it demands a careful response to some fundamental questions on the purpose, audience, limits, and value of a theodicy.

I do not agree with David Blumenthal's conclusions, but (as with Rubenstein), his challenges cannot be cursorily dismissed. He is forcing believers to make a stand on the problem of theodicy and demanding reasons for that position to be given.[2] In this light, like theological protest, Blumenthal's stance should be taken to a point, but to cross the Rubicon which he does, is ill-advised for a theodicist – and so any believer's – stance.

As Elie Wiesel writes: "Sometimes we must accept the pain of faith so as not to lose it. And if that makes the tragedy of the believer more devastating than that of the nonbeliever, then so be it".[3] Such a faith is no doubt wounded, or broken, as Greenberg would argue. And such a faith maintains that no justification would ever fully satisfy why God could allow such horrific events to happen, but faith in God nevertheless remains essential for meaning in life. Recall the *shema*: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone" (Dt 6:4). But then in the face of what seems divine negligence, what better way to express one's faith in a loving God of justice than through such a moral and spiritual response of questioning faith, even one that says we will continue to do Your will and follow Your laws even if You seem to be no longer watching and are deaf to our cries. As Levinas has written, "Loving the Torah even more than God means precisely having access to a personal God against Whom one may rebel – that is to say, for Whom one may die".[4] For perhaps, in the calling to confront and heal the other amidst that faithful rebelling and obdurate belief in God, one will eventually sense God's presence and encounter what one was determined to find all along. Perhaps it is only a matter of time. Perhaps, for those who have endured such travails, it, too, can be said: "God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites and took notice of them" (Ex 2:24). I will examine such a possibility in the final part of this work.

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1. Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 32.

2. As with the story of Exodus read in the context of the Holocaust, here, too, theological memory has been tainted by historical and political awareness of atrocity. If such a biblical quote comforts some, its imagery may also lead others to remember tragic events, further muddying the sense of hope in divine justice. One may recall shackled African slaves who were injured or pregnant and so jumped, fell, or were thrown into the ocean amidst that murderous ocean-journey; or more recently, the victims who were blindfolded and dropped alive into the sea amidst the horrors perpetrated in El Salvador, Argentina, and Guatemala.

3. Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs, 1969* -, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Schocken, 2000), 84.

4. Emmanuel Levinas, *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, trans. Séan Hand (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), 145.

Part Three

Seeking a Viable Theodicy Despite Mass Atrocity

> 'A lot of people got killed here. I myself killed some of the children...We had eighty kids in the first year. There are twenty-five left. All the others, we killed them or they have run away.'[1]

Introduction to Part Three

Christianity proclaims a God who loves every individual: thus, the slain children and the Hutu murderers referred to in the epigraph above are all beloved of God. A Christian theodicist, therefore, must weigh the evidence of slaughter and brutality and yet, must not call for revenge but for justice that is fair to victim, perpetrator, and society. Theologically, how one interprets divine justice and how it is manifested within this world and in the world to come are crucial components for how and whether one can speak of the goodness of God and the beauty and value of creation.

To address the above issues, in Part One I analysed testimonies of mass atrocity, focusing on how witnesses interpreted their experiences of unfathomable evil and suffering. I began with these testimonies because I argued that if theodicists are credibly to maintain that God and God's creation are good, they have to incorporate and work closely with the accounts of individuals mired in dehumanising and destructive suffering.

Part Two turned to Christian philosophical theodicy, Catholic Latin American liberation theology, and Jewish Post-Holocaust theology to evaluate a theodicy's honesty towards reality, pastoral validity, and relevance in the face of mass atrocity and horrific suffering. Because the latter two fields focus on the voiceless and oppressed of Latin America and the six million murdered Jews of the Shoah, respectively, I expected some of their key thinkers to share an affinity with my aims and concerns, and indeed, much of their thought will resonate in the next two chapters.

In the third and final part of this work, I want to examine the key issues posed by the testimonies from Part One to the theodicies in Part Two and the responses and questions these theodic works may pose to those testimonies. This investigation or 'dialogue' will be my focus in Chapter Ten. In the context of interreligious dialogue, John D'Arcy May has suggested: "the acknowledgement of failure, one's

own and others', could be a fruitful medium of communication within the dialogue itself".[2] May's claim would also seem to be a reasonable starting point for the theodicist turning in dialogue to a witness of mass atrocity.

In addition to this dialogue, in Chapter Ten I will return to the issue of justice and the afterlife by examining whether universal salvation aids or hinders a theodicist and how to address the role of memory, identity, and healing when reflecting upon victims of mass atrocity and the afterlife. Drawing upon the wide-range of theological, philosophical, and literary texts examined over the course of this work and building upon some of the conclusions in Chapter Ten, Chapter Eleven will identify and evaluate my five criteria for a Christian theodicy that seeks to develop a viable theodic stance despite – or perhaps, because of – mass atrocity and horrific suffering. In the Conclusion, I will offer reasons for why my approach to theodicy has helped advance the theodic discussion.

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1. Quoted fro a Hutu teacher during the Rwandan genocide in Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 515.

2. John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian, and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 134.

Chapter Ten

Testimonies of Mass Atrocity and Theodicy: A Dialogue

> During that twenty year period…millions of Christian men professing the law of love of their fellows slew one another. What does it all mean? Why did it happen? What made those people burn those houses and slay their fellow men?[1]

I. Introduction

The motivations for why we commit some acts and avoid others are complex and often conflicting, an issue that often complicates how justice should be enacted. Tolstoy's questions above underlie how precarious are the means to locate rational explanations for what we do. Ultimately, only God can judge an individual's motivations and intentions, which is why most theodicies must grapple with issues of soteriology and eschatology. As Christiaan Mostert writes: "On two counts, then, Christian theodicy cannot be attempted without eschatology: not only in its reliance on an eschatological verification of its hopes but also in the substance of this hope. The world's evil and suffering cannot make theological sense in any other framework; neither can it be incontrovertibly demonstrated other than eschatologically".[2] Where there is no afterlife or where healing and redemption make little sense in a heavenly context (as Phillips argues), the theodicy project fails. Denying the possibility for healing and compensation for children burned alive along with the fair judgement of an unrepentant mass murderer who died peacefully from old age, makes the worship of God a tenuous and I would argue, dumbfounding position. Put simply: to acknowledge a God who creates the universe but who does not have the means or desire to right wrongs in this world makes far less sense than not believing in God. As argued throughout this work, in order for one's theistic belief to be reasonable, one must develop a theodic position and response to mass atrocity and horrific suffering. As a productive means to work this out, this chapter aims to present and explore a 'dialogue' between the testimonies of witnesses to mass atrocity from Part One and the theodic responses analysed in Part Two.

In the course of doing so, I want to evaluate and answer the following questions:

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1. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Louise and Alymer Maude (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1942), 1314.

2. Christiaan Mostert, "Theodicy and Eschatology", in *Theodicy and Eschatology,* eds. Bruce Barber and David Neville (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 116.

1) What challenges have testimonies of mass atrocity raised for theodicies, and what, if any, answers or further challenges have these theodicies offered to these testimonies?
2) How should a theodicist envision God's encounter with a victim of mass atrocity? How does one articulate a continuity of identity while speaking of traumatic memories and heavenly bliss?
3) Does belief in universal salvation strengthen or undermine a theodicy?
4) Echoing Pilate's retort, "Truth, what is truth?", many of us recognise we live in an age where seemingly everything is questioned and doubted (language, history, identity, religious texts and traditions, and so on). If so, how does recognising discontinuities, absence, limitations, and fragments lead to a more authentic theodicy?

II. The Challenges Testimonies of Mass Atrocity Pose to Theodicists

A. On the Magnitude of Evil and Suffering[3]

In *Christianity, Tragedy, and Holocaust Literature*, Michael R. Steele asks: "…[D]oes individual suffering take on different values when portrayed and experienced in the context of tragedy as opposed to the context of atrocity and concentration camps?"[4] While Steele wants to examine why we need to revise literary theories of tragedy in light of the Holocaust, I have examined the experiences of victims of mass atrocity because I have contended that these manifestations of evils pose more severe challenges to a theodicist than other types of evil or suffering. Where some examples of suffering may be (grudgingly) deemed justifiable, or rather, still enable the possibility for a satisfactory theodicy,[5] mass atrocities and horrific suffering limit what theodicists can say. As repeated by a Phillips or Braiterman, certain evils should prevent a theodicist from trying to

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3. For an etymological discussion of suffering-evil, doing-evil, and sin see Ronald Paulson, *Sin and Evil: Moral Values in Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 1-33. See also David Pocock, "Unruly Evil", in *The Anthropology of Evil*, ed. David Parkin (Oxford: Basil Blakwell, 1986), 42-56.

4. Michael R. Steele, *Christianity, Tragedy, and Holocaust Literature* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1995), 106.

5. As noted in Chapter One, 'magnitude' can be a fairly subjective term, but common illnesses or allergies, the pain of a broken wrist, or more importantly, the fact of death for all of us (take the 'ideal' example of a person living a long, fulfilled life before dying in her nineties), will no doubt cause some pain and suffering, but would not, in my estimation, challenge the meaning and value of this world. The sudden death of a child from a freak accident, or more to my purposes, the millions of children dying from preventable disease or groups of people massacred by totalitarian governments in the twentieth century raise particularly acute problems in arguing for the overall value and beauty of this world and the God who created it.

"defend the indefensible".[6] I therefore highlight this issue as the first challenge these testimonies of mass atrocity pose to theodicists.

As my analysis in Chapter Two illustrates, some witness testimonies reveal examples of individual losses so concretely and brutally that even without the full knowledge of the genocidal forces that are at work beyond Nomberg-Przytyk's bunker or Gyatso's prison, the case of horrific evil and suffering have enough 'evidence' and testimony on their own to counteract traditional claims of theodicy. What type of world produces doctors who order a mother and her newborn's death (Esther in the story Nomberg-Przytyk told) immediately after the birth, or trains guards to torture a Tibetan monk? When one tries to contemplate the extent of the evil or the number of people murdered in the greater historical context of those individual crimes, the reality is beyond human imagining. The scale and scope of the loss seems to render circumspect the language of 'good' creation, God's presence in the world, or the possibility for God to redeem or heal these evils. To quote again Gerald Gashima, Deputy Justice Minister of Rwanda: "It was as if there was a kind of collective insanity". When a large part of our world seems mired in nihilism and savagery, arguing for inherent or pervasive goodness in such a world becomes a particularly difficult task.

Arguing why God did not stop atrocities like Auschwitz is to say God should not have allowed the little people to be cruelly experimented on and then sent to the gas chambers; and for Graciela, five months pregnant, not to be "tortured with electric shocks" and later removed from the Little School and never heard from again.[7] Thus within the issue of scale are the individual lives that, as Ivan Karamazov argues, are reasons enough to question the existence of a loving God. But with knowledge of the number of lives senselessly murdered and the civic and religious institutions that benefited or were silent about such atrocities, not to mention the larger world's inaction, it is difficult not to admit that such evils point to a world gone awry, a world made difficult to justify when so many of its inhabitants have been cruelly tortured, murdered, and abandoned by their fellow human beings. In such a world, God's presence seems obscured by the screams of victims, the machinations of perpetrators, and the silence of bystanders. Moreover, in turning to history for evidence or testimony of God's presence despite these obstacles, one is hard-pressed to find a lucid, over-arching meta-narrative that proves a meaningful

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6. D.Z. Phillips, *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publications, 2004), xi; Zachary Braiterman, *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 32.

7. Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School* (San Francisco: Kleis Press, 1993), 123-124.

telos or a God that remains firmly in control despite these atrocities, as the next challenge argues.

B. Historical Caesuras and the Presence of God

To locate (or speculate upon) God's active presence in the world, a theodicist may turn to history to try to identify the holy and spiritual within both the common and the dramatic events of our lives. Testimonies that witness these ruptures within history, however, challenge and undermine the issue of God's presence within our world or the belief in Christ's solidarity with victims of oppression. When a fellow Jewish prisoner of the *Sonderkommando* began to pray, Filip Müller, for example, writes: "To me it seemed sheer madness to pray in Auschwitz, and absurd to believe in God in this place". While Müller and the others participated in these prayers, he writes that it was "probably because we had nothing else left or because we felt strengthened by his faith".[8] He does not speak of God's presence, though. While acts of ordinary goodness are depicted in some witness testimony, as seen in Chapter Two when Partnoy distracted the guard who was torturing Benja or when Gyatso prayed for the condemned woman,[9] the dominant message gleaned from the majority of the witness testimonies I look at is bleak and senseless. Children "displayed a frightening and incorrigibly vengeful cruelty, without restraint or responsibility"[10]; prisoners were forced to pummel and torture one another[11]; and neighbour viciously attacked neighbour.[12] While perpetrators of mass atrocity often acknowledge, as one Hutu did, that "Through killing well, eating well, looting well, we felt so puffed up and important, we didn't even care about the presence of God",[13] other accounts speak of perpetrators invoking God amidst the slaying and mutilation. Another Hutu, for example, describes how Hutus and Tutsis participated together in choir rehearsal at Church on the Saturday before the genocide began, and after Sunday mass (which only Hutus attended because Tutsis were hiding by then), the Hutus "left the Lord and our prayers inside to rush home. We changed from our

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8. Filip Muller, "*Eyewitness to Auschwitz": Ten Years in the Gas Chambers*, trans. Susanne Flatauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 29.

9. For an examination of the "banality of goodness" and the question of ethical choice in the camps, see Didier Pollefeyt, "Victims of Evil or Evil of Victims", in *Problems Unique to the* Holocaust, ed. Harry James Cargas (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 67-82.

10. Lev Razgon, quoted in Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Anchor, 2003), 332.

11. Palden Gyatso, *Fire Under the Sun: Testimony of a Tibetan Prisoner,* trans. Tsering Shakya (London: Harvill Press, 1997), 132.

12. Elizabeth Neuffer, *The Key to My Neighbor's House: Seeking Justice in Bosnia and Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 2001), 185.

13. Léopold, interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Picador, 2006), 147.

Sunday best into our workday clothes, we grabbed clubs and machetes, we went straight off to killing".[14] Of some Nazis, Emil Fackenheim writes: "As early as 1936, Julius Streicher [who among other crimes, published three anti-Semitic books for children for the Nazi regime] was quoted in print as follows: he 'who fights the Jew fights the devil! Who masters the devil conquers heaven!' Streicher no more than echoed the Führer himself who earlier still had written: 'In defending myself against the Jew, I fight for the work of God'".[15]

While most theists would resolutely refute Streicher and Hitler's words, the historical record becomes a difficult account or drama to posit conclusively God's role and presence.[16] These atrocities, perpetrated by humans upon humans, were also, eventually, halted or momentarily controlled by humans; perhaps by a treaty, but almost always accompanied by a tank and army. If God's presence was amidst that conquering, it was often difficult to gauge, at least historically. The Soviets liberated some Nazi concentration camps, but the gulags continued to murder and degrade millions of human beings at an alarming rate; reprisal killings and rapes meant liberating Soviet forces raped or abducted German women,[17] and some moderate or innocent Hutus were slain by the finally 'liberated' Tutsis of Rwanda, whose government-backed army later (post-1998) looted the Eastern Congo and treated it as a "fiefdom" until a series of "tortuous negotiations" established the interim government led by Joseph Kabilia in 2002.[18] We often are left with fractured justice, fractured innocence, and fractured language where 'liberation' can mean slavery for so many. Seeking direction and identity by turning to one's history, we are instead often left with contradiction and concealment, a distortion that plays

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14. Adalbert, interviewed by Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 140.

15. Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 188.

16. In his essay "Sacraments in General", Regis A. Duffy writes: "A sacrament, then, is a presence-filled event in which God gratuitously enables us to welcome the message of salvation more deeply in the paschal mystery, and to receive gratefully that transforming and healing power that gathers us as the community of God's Son so as to announce the reign of God in the power of the Spirit" [*Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Volume II*, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 185]. Speaking of God's sacramental presence has great potential to begin to articulate God in the midst of atrocity, but again, some accounts of mass atrocity are very resistant to such a hopeful and promising reading, offering few, if any signs of fellowship or love. On the whole, anti-signs of God's presence seem to dominate. Recall one of the harrowing scenes from Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*: "Between two throw-ins in a soccer game, right behind my back, 3,000 people had been put to death" [(trans. Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin, 1976), 84]. We must also recall the ordination of Karl Leisner from Chapter Two. Such an issue is worth pursuing in greater depth.

17. See Judy Dempsey, "German Women Seized During World War II Seek Recognition", *The International Herald Tribune* (on-line edition), 15 June 2007. http://www.iht.com/articles/2007/06/15/news/letter.php. Accessed 18 June 2007.

18. Martin Meredith, *The Fate of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: Public Affaris, 205), 543-4.

havoc with one's memory and sense of self. Testimonies that account for these evils and contradictions again challenge a theological belief of God involved within and beyond history, especially when an outsider is confronted by an internal witness who experienced these evils and can testify to their horrors, and often, the failure of any theodicy to make sense of their predicament or to speak credibly of God's presence in the midst of their affliction. Seeking evidence for a theodic position is further muddied by the inevitable role that subjectivity and interpretation play in forming one's religious faith (or lack of faith), as these testimonies show.

C. Faith Mired in Subjective Interpretation

This distorted knowledge and fractured memory that results from a contested, multifaceted, and multi-layered history inevitably can cause a faith crisis in interpreting the 'truth' of any particular event and in trying to argue for the presence of God. Darrell Fasching, for example, writes: "...the Holocaust has become the occasion for a hermeneutical rupture – a crisis in the interpretation of meaning".[19] This is especially the case if one's theological or ethical framework has been complicit or silent in the face of mass suffering and atrocity. Such a crisis implies that no stable, objective methodology or belief system can be unquestionably relied upon to interpret, judge, and promulgate a proper theological and ethical response because of the Holocaust and other mass atrocities. As Didier Pollefeyt aptly writes: "Every person, every philosophy, and every political system after Auschwitz should be questioned ethically in this way: 'Is it open for alterity, for the vulnerability of the weakest, for growth, discussion, questioning, hesitation, falsification, new challenges, for transcendent experiences?'"[20]

To challenge and purify my theological grounding and identity as a Catholic theologian, I have turned to witnesses of mass atrocity and, in particular, to select Catholic Latin American liberation theologians, who live among the poor and the oppressed, and post-Holocaust Jewish theologians, who are trying to persevere in their faith despite the destruction of the Shoah. My focus is a conscious decision to change the *social locus* of most theodicists, to borrow a phrase used by Marcello De C. Azevedo in his essay "Basic Ecclesial Communities". He writes: "*Social locus* is the point from which people perceive, understand, and interpret their reality or from

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19. Darrell J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 22.

20. Didier Pollefeyt, "Critique" [of Leonard Grob's essay: "Emmanuel Levinas and the Primacy of Ethics in Post-Holocaust Philosophy"] in *Ethics After Auschwitz: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses*, Ed. John K. Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 31.

which they act upon it".[21] I have been arguing that one needs to develop a theodicy" from the "underside of history", from the perspective of the marginalised and voiceless. The key issue, however, is whether my (Catholic Christian) theological grounding can still be relied upon in light of the existence of mass atrocity and horrific suffering. When my faith tradition asserts a loving God in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, how do I interpret the following claim by Pio, a Hutu convicted of genocide: "Many Tutsis … stopped hoping, they knew they had no chance for mercy and went off without a single prayer. They knew they were abandoned by everything, even God. They no longer spoke to Him at all"?[22] And yet, this is a perpetrator's interpretation of his victims. To cede him authority on his victims' last moments seems to be a further desecration of their lives and memories. He could not know what they were thinking; and yet, one of his fellow killers, Élie, admits that [their gang, which includes Pio] mocked another group of Tutsis who had prayed before being murdered: "We made fun of them, we laughed at their *Amens*, we taunted them about the kindness of the Lord, we joked about the paradise awaiting them. That fired us up even more".[23] Pio interpreted the other Tutsis' silence above as despair. Perhaps he was wrong and they did not feel abandoned by God, but if he is right, how does this reflect upon theodic arguments and positions that want to assert otherwise?

It is important to recognise that all interpretation, whether of a text or an historical event, at some point, involves faith: faith in an author or witness' intentions; faith in the sources one consults; faith in the ideological or social location one inhabits to view this history (often misleadingly deemed an 'objective' vantage point); faith in the general consensus of a community one trusts; faith in the methodologies of analysis and interpretation one has been taught to employ or has come to believe are more valid and useful. How one processes and articulates this 'faith' inevitably colours and determines one's narratives and judgements, the selection of facts, and the focus or lens one uses to highlight the key figures or events one chooses to describe. As Fasching contends, the Holocaust and similar historical ruptures have challenged any certitude in the objectivity and superiority of one's interpretative moral framework and methodology.

However, while it is specious of Christian theodicists to avoid identifying their own limitations, biases, and potential blind spots, there still needs to be some criteria

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21. Marello de C. Azevedo, "Basic Ecclesial Communities" in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Margaret D. Wilde (New York: Orbis, 1993), 648.

22. Pio, interviewed by Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 143.

23. Élie, interviewed by Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 143.

that one can employ to try to judge which viewpoint or method may be more likely to come closer to an approximation of the truth, properly called, and reach a reasonable and credible position. But based on what (or whose) criteria? In light of those who are sceptical of the possibility for reaching a rational consensus on what is true, right, just, and good, John Roth refers to Michael Berenbaum's description of the Holocaust as a "negative absolute". However, Roth adds that such a phrase does not "reinstate confidence in moral absolutes" because Berenbaum's term also refers to ethics itself, which was not "immune from failure, and at times, complicity in the pathological conditions and characteristics that nearly destroyed Jewish life and left the world morally scarred forever".[24]

One can already see some of the challenges raised by many postmodern thinkers, as Braiterman argued in the previous chapter. Identity, truth, meaning, history, morality, objectivity – all are rendered potentially suspect by the Holocaust and other mass atrocities. When such basic identity-markers are challenged, asserting any truth, let alone the presence of God, becomes contestable and subjective. Turning to testimonies of mass atrocity illustrates how core moral and religious beliefs are denied or manipulated: giving birth to a child means automatic death for mother and child,[25] crimes of genocide are denied and concealed as they are perpetuated,[26] and children are taught how to cut and slice a human being, as Clémentine, a Hutu woman admits: "I saw papas teaching their boys how to cut. They made them imitate the machete blows. They displayed their skill on dead people, or on living people they had captured during the day. The boys usually tried it out on children, because of their similar size. But most people did not want to involve the children directly in these bloody doings, except for watching of course".[27] Particularly troubling for me is Clémentine's last sentence. Just as she mentions some parents not wanting their children to participate in the killing – and I anticipated her saying how some parents opposed the killings – she adds matter-of-factly that all children watched the murders, "of course". Because it was "as if there was a kind of collective insanity", these occurrences challenge any sense of moral stability, or more prosaically, a means or methodology of interpretation and judgement that one can rely upon to navigate the complexities and contradictions rife within a world seemingly gone awry.

And yet, we also know there were exceptions to this "collective insanity". Can

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24. John Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2007), 26.

25. See the chapter "Accursed Births", in Olga Lengyl, *A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995), 113-6.

26. Müller, *Eyewitness to Auschwitz*, 25-6.

these exceptions be a ground to maintain a position of stability and objectivity that can still morally evaluate, judge, interpret, and analyse these events, as Fackenheim hoped in Chapter Nine? To seek some sense of a stable theoretical framework and methodology, could one maintain that a 'solid' hermeneutical practice is possible if it employs sound 'textual' analysis and interpretation, characterised by an open, reflective, sobering mind that can isolate and determine the sources, influences, and themes within specific 'passages' and recognise other congruities (along with incongruities) to argue for a basic (or potentially, comprehensive) meaning, structure, narrative, or argument? Perhaps, but such a method will never be free of potential distortion, error, or misjudgement. This acknowledgement means proving a universally valid principle of organisation or meaning in regards to truth claims likely remains out of reach. John D'Arcy May, writing about the possibility to "state 'universal' principles as the basis of morality, argues: "The human sciences have not yet reached the stage of objectivity where their findings can be regarded as devoid of all prejudice or distortion, and they now build this subjectivity and contextuality of viewpoint into their own methodologies".[28] The interpreter, ultimately, must at some level trust and have faith in the honesty and integrity of an actor or author and in the mode and method of his or her inquiry. While subjective, isolated interpretation will never be as fruitful as one that engages in dialogue with a larger community or group, in a world turned upside down, when children are taught how to kill other children, and society at large sanctions it or is indifferent, how does one claim and maintain a reliable (if not 'objective') status and refute the assertion that one's faith is not merely personal and subjective? If one cannot refute such a claim, then trying to argue for God's active presence in this world is simply based on opinion or less charitably, mere projection.

Sadly, it seems there will never be unanimity in stating the exact truth of a certain event, or whether God's presence was or was not felt at a certain moment. For every voice that sings and praises the saving work and grace of God, there will be others who deny the possibility or remain unsure or undecided on the matter. Such varied and conflicting assertions indelibly mean one must choose and decide which view is likely true. While a believer in God may feel tempted to discount, or momentarily 'evade' or minimise the significance of some opposing arguments, sooner or later one must acknowledge the moral obligation to seek the truth. And in

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27. Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 40.

28. John D'Arcy May, "Whose Universality? Which Interdependence? Human Rights, Social Responsibility, and Ecological Integrity" in *Postcolonial Europe in the Crucible of Culture: Reckoning with God in a World of Conflicts,* eds. Jacques Haers, Norbert Hintersteiner, and Georges De Schrijver (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 201.

doing so, truth-claims often collide, as Eliezer Berkovits emphasised in Chapter Nine and the next section develops further.

D. When the Language of Levi and Wiesel Collide

A theodicist attuned to the witnesses of atrocities is forced to recognise a variety of conflicting views and testimonies, some of which he or she will highly prize and admire even though they assert the opposite picture of a God of love and involvement in our world (the writings of Primo Levi, for me, for example). Such testimonies reveal that no discernible presence of God (or for Christians, Christ or the Holy Spirit) accompanied many during and after their torture and mutilation. They paint human beings metamorphosed to *Muselmänner*, dehumanised and broken.[29] They depict children and babies annihilated before their lives had a chance to blossom.[30] They narrate individuals coerced to commit horrendous acts upon those they love and care for.[31] They testify to a God whose people feel abandoned.[32]

At the least, these texts deny any meaningful connection between God and this world. Or if a tenuous connection exists, the picture is of a God who saves a few and abandons the majority based on unknown criteria or is impotent to do otherwise. The evil is rarely purposive, rarely cathartic. It often crushes and eradicates, as I emphasised in Chapter Four with my analysis of *Salvifici Doloris*. And yet, this world is also replete with magnanimous and sublime moments of goodness and beauty. To emphasise this last point, I have also included stories that accentuate the goodness of humanity in horrific conditions or those individuals who maintained – or even discovered – faith in God during their trauma and torture. Grace Akallo, for example, abducted as a child soldier in Uganda and forced to endure torture and horrendous suffering, still begins her memoir in the Acknowledgement page as follows: "First, I dedicate this book to God, who gave me the gift of life, protected me and gave me his love".[33]

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29. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Stuart Woolf (New York: Touchstone Book, 1996), 90.

30. Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War Two* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 91. See also the chapter "Nobody's Children: Mogadishu, Somalia, February 2002", in Janine Di Giovanni, *The Place at the End of the World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 341-59.

31. Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Sara Crichton Books, 2007), 37.

32. Joseph Bau, *Dear God, Have You Ever Gone Hungry?*, trans. Shlomo Yurman (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 74.

33. Faith J. H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo, *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2007), 'Dedication' page.

Thus, one is at an impasse. Reading the gulag accounts of a Harry Wu or Irina Ratushinskaya[34] may mean one can still hope and have faith in God and humanity's goodness, but this realisation in no way annuls or subsumes its polar opposite tales. We are left with paradox and conflicting accounts. You may hold on to the Christ-filled life of Karl Leisner, and someone else to Alicia Partnoy's heroic, but pragmatic atheism, and each would have sources and evidence.

The reason we need to account for these contrary assertions is to seek to do justice to the stories of both types of victims. The fact that some individuals aver that God did not abandon them, at the least, means God has not been totally extricated from God's people. While a survivor's testimony about feeling God's presence cannot be scientifically proved, neither can all such assertions be scientifically disproved. One could argue that God is arbitrarily selective in comforting (or appearing to) certain individuals and not to others, or one could contend that the fault lies not with God but with the individual who did not seek God or was unable (or unwilling) to recognise God's voice. The latter position would argue that Partnoy's goodness and heroism were never totally removed from God's presence. Despite her denial of this contention, it may not be duplicitous to speak of the Holy Spirit being with her (or that she was filled with the Spirit when she tried to help Benja as he was being tortured before he was later shot and murdered[35]). And yet, this assertion blames a sufferer who already has endured enough and limits human responsibility and goodness, while the first assertion would not reflect a magnanimous, loving God to all in this life. The conflict, then, as Berkovits and others have highlighted is whether and how one can honour both the faithful and the despairing with equal respect while still advocating a theodicy. These testimonies make such a commitment a precarious and paradoxical exercise.

E. Why Some Evil Resists Transformation

Though one's response to another's suffering is essential, as discussed throughout this work, certain acts of evil are senseless and meaningless in themselves. One cannot justify them by claiming such acts teach lessons or are conducive to soul-making. As Lawrence Langer writes: "There is nothing to be learned from a baby torn in two or a woman burned alive".[36]

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34. See Harry Wu, *Bitter Winds* (New York John Wiley and Sons, 1994); and Irina Ratushinskaya, *Grey is the Color of Hope*, trans. Alyona Kojevnikov (Vintage: New York, 1989).

35. Partnoy, *Little School*, 125.

36. Quoted in Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust,* 34.

In short, some of the suffering and deaths in these testimonials that depict such calamities or atrocities resist any interpretation that seeks to justify their occurrence. It challenges those individuals who argue that suffering is meaningful because it is a way to identify with Christ (McCord Adams), is a means to participate in Christ's redemption (John Paul II), or helps one join in solidarity with the plight of the poor and oppressed and so can be transformative (Gutiérrez). Phillips, therefore, is right to challenge and resist such justificatory or causal language, which implies that the Holocaust, or another type of evil, happened in order that some good could result. Instead, one should be clear that good may occur in response to such evil but that good in no way justifies the occurrence of such horrific suffering. The depiction and interpretation of such evils within these texts problematises any attempt to maintain all suffering is necessary, redemptive, or part of God's plan. Moreover, such texts also scrutinise and challenge the power of prayer, which is often deemed a potential link to God and proof of God's active presence. I will examine such claims below.

F. Testimonials' Impact on Prayer

Recall the tragic story from Chapter One of Little Eleanora, victim of the Soviet gulag despite all her mother's prayers and effort. Such cases challenge belief in the "power of prayer" as a means to serve as an intimate contact between God and the believer. In the preface to the new translation of *Night*, Elie Wiesel writes: "I don't know *how* I survived…a miracle? Certainly not. If heaven could or would perform a miracle for me, why not for others more deserving than myself? It was nothing more than chance. However, having survived I needed to give some meaning to my survival".[37] Such a response seems the most rational, humble, and sobering, especially as Wiesel still asserts he has an additional moral responsibility because he survived. On the other hand, a different type of belief in God's continuing presence in this world and in the power and healing of prayer may seek to make grand, but still potentially true, claims.

In the *Massacre of El Mozote*, Mark Danner revisits the scene in El Salvador from 1981 where the Atcatl Battalion massacred every man, woman, and child in the village save two who managed to escape. One was Rufina Amaya. The soldiers entered the village, separated the men from the women and then proceeded to slaughter the men and then rape and murder the women. Rufina recalls: "I was crying and miserable, and begging God to help me". The killing continued. "I promised to God that if He helped me, I would tell the world what happened here."

37. Elie Wiesel, "Preface to The New Translation", in *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (London: Penguin, 2006), viii.

As she describes how the soldiers began to kill the children, she adds: "There were animals there, cows and a dog, and they saw me, and I was afraid they would make a noise, but God made them stay quiet as I crawled among them".[38]

Similar remarks are made by Immaculée Ilibagiza, who depicts numerous incidents where she was surrounded by Hutu killers and yet managed to live. In one instance, three *Interahamwe* followed her:

> 'I know this cockroach,' [one of them] said, 'This is Leonard's daughter – we've been looking for her for months! I can't believe she's still alive… we killed the rest of them, but this little cockroach gave us the slip!' [Clutching her father's rosary, Ilibagiza prayed fervently]: 'Only you can save me. You promised to take care of me God – well, I really need taking care of right now. There are devils and vultures at my back, Lord…please protect me. Take the evil from the hearts of these men, and blind their hatred with Your holy love… If they kill me, God, I ask you to forgive them'.[39]

The group disbanded. She lived. Other calamities have similar instances of unexpected survivors or witnesses. One is almost tempted to believe such survivors are granted life as witnesses so that the world would discover the truth, but there have been some massacres without survivors. Moreover, if God chose to save this or that individual, the conclusion one could draw is almost worse. In this case God specifically saved certain people or listened to certain prayers (if indeed the prayer played any role in the selection) but not similarly 'worthy' individuals who were then raped, abused, or tortured to death.

Of course, biblical history is steeped in the drama of God selecting certain individuals to lead or guide God's people amidst adversity and persecution. As noted in Chapter Eight, rabbis employed theological protest in part to claim the present circumstances may be bleak but God will save and redeem. The hope hangs on the precipice of the present calamity supported by past deeds. And yet it is very difficult to sustain this hope without rendering the losses that have already happened as somehow forgivable if God acts 'now'.

In an often-cited passage of *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi describes a situation after a routine selection had decided the fate of numerous prisoners. One man, Kahn, prayed and thanked God for surviving a selection despite knowing there were individuals in bunks next to him who had been condemned for the ovens. Levi

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38. Mark Danner, *The Massacre at El Mozote* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 74-5.
39. Immaculée Ilibagiza, with Steve Erwin, *Left to Tell, Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (Carlsbad: Hay House, 2006), 173.

writes: "Does Kahn not understand that it is an abomination which no propitiatory prayer, no pardon, no expiation of the guilty by the guilty, which nothing in the power of man can ever clear again?" Thus, because of these atrocities, some prayers or prayer-practices ironically become unethical and inappropriate. Or, without saving everyone, any prayer becomes an abomination, as God then seems carelessly to select some to die and some to live. As Primo Levi has remarked: "Barring [being in good health and knowing German], luck dominated. I have seen the survival of shrewd people and silly people, the brave and the cowardly, 'thinkers' and madmen".[40]

However, prayer broadly understood prevents the assertion that all prayer is inappropriate or meaningless. Bernard McGinn writes: "One customary division of prayer (based on 1 Tim 2:1) speaks of four forms: praise, thanksgiving, penance, and petition".[41] The divisions are flexible enough to admit a wide spectrum of actions and practices. In this vein, these texts do not obliterate the power or purpose of one's prayer life – especially in the sense of one's life as a potentially continual contact and private communion with God. As Origen writes: "he 'prays without ceasing' who joins prayer to works that are of obligation, and good works to his prayer".[42] Similarly, Dean Brackley adds:

> When we serve God habitually, everything we do becomes a kind of prayer. Thomas Aquinas applied the word 'prayer' in this broad sense: 'As long as one is acting in one's heart, speech, or work in such a way as to tend towards God, one is praying. One who is directing one's whole life towards God is praying always'.[43]

Recall also Metz's famous comment: "we can pray *after* Auschwitz because people prayed *in* Auschwitz".[44] Former child soldier Grace Akallo, for example, narrates how she suggested to her companions that they pray while they were on the run from their captors. "The girls looked at me strangely but obeyed silently".[45] Amidst atrocity and horrendous suffering, some people prayed in both the traditional sense and in the broader notion of doing good deeds for others.

These testimonies do, however, clearly raise questions against the standard

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40. Quoted in Philip Roth, "A Conversation with Primo Levi", in *Survival in Auschwitz*, 180.

41. Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism,* ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 79.

42. Origen, in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, 84.

43. Dean Brackley *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 246.

44. Johann-Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church*, trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 19. Fackenheim raised a similar rationale as noted in Chapter Nine.

45. Akallo, *Girl Soldier*, 160.

interpretation of prayer as "knock and it shall be opened onto you". At the same time, miracles, mystery, and murkiness pervade not only the Christian religion, but the reality of our world. This is not to deny one can also argue for a sense of order, rhythm, and law in the universe, but mystery and the unknown remain a palpable and formidable presence. Because some individuals have sensed and assertively claim the power of prayer (and so the presence of God) while others have denied this possibility, does not automatically prove the latter are the ones more 'correct' or trustworthy. Perhaps, one is again staring at two conflicting truths, and as Wiesel has written, "Sometimes we must accept the pain of faith so as not to lose it. And if that makes the tragedy of the believer more devastating than that of the disbeliever, then so be it".[46] A faith-position or faith-searcher that relentlessly plumbs the depths to which some individuals have suffered agony and torment ironically can come to acknowledge the greater need for belief in a God of justice and mercy.[47] This does not mean faith in God becomes an opiate or psychological neurosis, but is recognised as a genuine calling and *telos* that reveals the type of moral life that is best suited to the essence of becoming fully human – the path that helps to answer our deepest mystical and ontological searches for our purpose and destiny. Confronting the truths of such evil and suffering points to a need to look beyond ourselves and this world with a concomitant calling to transform our way of life even more deeply in order to challenge and decry similar injustice. While questions of the origin of this evil remain empirically beyond us, the options before us, amidst the conflicting views and evidence, offer a few stark choices, all of which leaves some inevitable trace of doubt and uncertainty. All the choices will rest on what can only be deemed 'faith'. The key question is in where that faith resides.

G. Uniqueness and Meaning of Christianity

For Christians, these testimonies can brutally challenge the belief in the uniqueness of Christ as the answer to the problem of evil. They particularly gnaw at the relevance of Christ's presence amidst such despondency and torture and the purpose and tangible accomplishments of Jesus's life, crucifixion, and resurrection. This important, but complex, issue needs at least to be raised here again because it in many ways cuts to the heart of the uniqueness of a Christian theodicy. In truth, however, it is a topic too controversial and intricate to treat here without slipping

46. Elie Wiesel *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs 1969* -, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 84.

47. Müller, "*Eyewitness to Auschwitz*", 66.

into superficiality. A few general remarks, however, for future direction may be of interest.

While responding to a passage of John Paul II's *Crossing the Threshold of Hope,* in which John Paul writes that "Christ is absolutely original and absolutely unique," Thich Nhat Hanh comments:

> This statement does not seem to reflect the deep mystery of the oneness of the Trinity. It also does not reflect the fact that Christ is also the Son of Man. All Christians, while praying to God, address Him as Father. Of course Christ is unique. The idea behind the statement, however, is the notion that Christianity provides the only way of salvation and all other religious traditions are of no use. This attitude excludes dialogue and fosters religious intolerance and discrimination.[48]

Recognising that the concept of uniqueness may vary in different cultures, Hans Waldenfals points out: "Western people, also Western Christian thinkers, cannot and simply should not presuppose that Asian people easily understand the important role which individuality, singularity, and uniqueness play in Occidental thought and life".[49] As noted in Chapter One, and reinforced by John D'Arcy May's comment that interfaith participants need to enter into a dialogue with an acknowledged sense of mutual failure,[50] a theodicist who turns to the words of survivor testimony – especially of those who do not share one's faith tradition – must remain open to the possibility that one will not only learn from the other but that the other's face, words, and experience may challenge one to change or clarify aspects of one's own theological position.[51]

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48. Quoted in the "Introduction," Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (London: Rider, 1995), xx-xxi.

49. Hans Waldenfels, S.J., "Ecclesia in Asis" in *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, eds. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 201.

50. John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian, and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 134.

51. There are a number of insightful and engaging works that examine the uniqueness of Christianity, often in the context of interreligious dialogue or a discussion of religious pluralism and are relevant to a Christian theodicist. Here are some relevant works: *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997); *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of* Religions, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990); The *Myth of Religious Superiority*: *A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), Part Five, "Christian Perspectives", 133-207. Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005), 85-101, 137-146; Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 115-120, 156-164, 186-195; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (London: Rider, 1995), Introduction and 34-60; John Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 108-135; John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian, and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 137-141. Georges de Schrijver, S.J., *Recent Theological Debates in Europe: Their Impact on Interreligious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2004), 230-261 ["Rahner's Theory of the 'Anonymous

A fundamental problem is how I can argue for a Christian theodicy when voices and perspectives that I respect (Partnoy and Levi) point to their wounds and scars and argue against the relevance of a Christian theodicy for their ordeals. Without disparaging Jesus of Nazareth's crucifixion, they may also question why Christians interpret the meaning of Christ's life as the highest ideal of facing and enduring suffering and as the ultimate act of God's love for all. As Charlotte Delbo writes:

> You who have wept two thousand years / for one who agonized three days and three nights / what tears will you have left / . . . for those who agonized through so many agonies / and they were countless / They did not believe in the resurrection to eternal life / and knew you would not weep.[52]

As non-Christians who have experienced horrific evils, moreover, many victims would doubt Jesus's death and resurrection provided the means for complete redemption of the world.[53] They may also credit their own traditions and beliefs for how they survived their ordeals. Beri Laga, a Tibetan prisoner of the Communist Chinese, "amazed even the Chinese guards by her tenacity. 'They found it incredible that I was still alive,' she told [Mary Craig], 'and even more incredible when I said it was because of my religious faith. I had prayed night and day to the Three Jewels to come through the ordeal; and my faith kept me going'".[54] Clearly, one treads a fine line when making Christological statements to victims who are either atheists or believers of a non-Christian religion. Words, if any, must be chosen carefully.

H. Impact on Evangelising and Apologetics

While rarely noted, these texts of mass atrocity also challenge the place and role of evangelising, and so an underlying task of theodicy.[55] In fact, because theodicy

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Christian': The Balthusar-Rahner Dispute"]; *In Many and Diverse Ways: In Honor of Jacques Dupuis*, eds. Daniel Kendall and Gerald O'Collins (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003), 33-100, 194-208; Choan-Seng Song, *Third-Eye Theology*, Revised Ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 119-141; *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 143-169; "Part Three: Interreligious Relations as Ecumenics" in *Ecumenics From the Rim: Explorations in Honour of John D'Arcy May*, eds. John O'Grady and Peter Scherle (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 197-341; John D'Arcy May, "Catholic Fundamentalism? Some Implications of *Dominus Iesus* for Dialogue and Peacemaking", in *"Dominus Iesus": Anstößige wahrheit oder anstößige Kirsche? Dokumente, Hintergründe, Standpunkte, and Folgerungen* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2001), 112-123; and Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 69-78, and 143-169.

52. Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 10.

53. Lawrence Langer's comment: "that neither Job nor Jesus illuminate the Holocaust" would be echoed by many survivors of atrocity [*Admitting the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 27].

54. Mary Craig, *Tears of Blood: A Cry for Tibet* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1999), 206.

55. Take Greenberg's working principle. How would one evangelise Christ to any surviving parents or siblings of those burned Jewish babies?

seeks to justify traditional belief in God and so shares affinity with evangelisation and apologetics, these testimonies challenge how one defends and seeks to spread one's beliefs. Because they undermine the presuppositions and rationale of some theodic arguments, they challenge the foundation of one's faith.

As argued above, the more one exposes oneself to divergent voices, the more difficult it can be to assert theological statements without qualifiers. This does not imply theists must be silent. We reach a choice or belief on an essential matter after much deliberation, questioning, testing (and for many, praying). The fact that we could be theoretically wrong does not necessarily dampen our fervour and commitment to what we ultimately assented to or decided. Moreover, theodicies benefit from exposure to individuals or groups who do not share a theodicist's specific religious foundation because they demand (and deserve) a careful, nuanced articulation of sometimes obtuse and unclear beliefs.

Christological statements, theoretically, have their place in the context of dialoguing with non-Christian sufferers and victims, and may be words that some individuals desperately need to hear, as I touched upon in discussing Greenberg's working principle.[56] Despite its challenges, maintaining Christ's uniqueness can remain a spiritually and rationally-rich claim, particularly if one emphasises the scandal of the cross as a link to fellow sufferers and argues why such solidarity matters. While seeking to heal the person's wounds or simply listening to the traumatic story may be the more proper representation of the love and life of Christ than traditional evangelising or apologetics, such has its rightful place as well, especially if such a dialogue is characterised by listening, openness, honesty, and humility. As Juan Ramón Romero writes:

> In order to be evangelising, to be Good News, the word must be effective; a word that in some matter effects what it announces, an existential word that, like the uncreated Word, becomes incarnate in history and transforms it from within. In Jesus the word is accompanied by concrete deeds that make it real by transforming reality and effectively communicating life.[57]

And yet, for a Christian, respecting the integrity of the non-Christian Other and one's Christian beliefs is to inhabit a theological terrain of constraint, disagreement, awkwardness, and vulnerability.

Before I address some of the responses of theodicists to these challenges, I want

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56. See Chapters One, Five, and Nine.

57. Juan Ramón Romero, "Evangelization," in *Mysterium Liberationis, Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993), 573.

to return to another area these testimonies challenge: the issue of God's omnipotence –which I initially addressed in Chapter Three, and which will also be a crucial aspect of the last section of this chapter.

I. The Limitations of Omnipotence II

The unceasing cries of victims, the manifestation of atrocious acts by perpetrators, and the overwhelming sense of loss and isolation that haunts many victims and perpetrators demand a clarification or reformulation of what it means to speak of God's omnipotence while maintaining the notion of a God of perfect love. Building on what was said above, I must return to the issue of God's relationship with this world and what it means to speak of an intervening and omnipotent God. On the one hand, Brian Davies writes: "Talk about God as intervening has to presuppose that there is commonly a serious absence of God from created things".[58] Contra Davies, one may instead speak of the presence of God as being made more manifest in certain moments, people, or natural events. Biblical history can surely be read this way. From a Christian standpoint, as Ignacio Ellacuría writes: "[Jesus's] unique way of intervening in history, of making God historically present among human beings, is of course proclaiming the Kingdom of God, making it present in himself and setting it in motion".[59] In a similar vein, José Comblin writes:

> Theology, like the popular Christian religious experience itself, knows very well that the *Dios Liberador* will not deliver the people of God by means of physical miracles, as in Egypt or the wilderness. God will not deliver from without by sheer blows of the divine will. God delivers the people by means of the forces and energies that God places within the people, by means of the enlightenment and prophetic charisma of mighty leaders, by means of the union and solidarity of living communities, and by means of the enthusiasm of the multitudes these communities and prophets succeed in arousing.[60]

From the exploitation and extermination of the native peoples of the Americas to the genocides committed against the Armenians, Jews, Roma, Tutsis, and others; in light of the millions upon millions of people who die (are murdered) prematurely

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58. Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2006), 75.

59. Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Historicity of Christian Salvation" in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Margaret D. Wilde (New York: Orbis, 1993), 282. See also my discussion of the option for the poor in Chapters Five and Six.

60. José Comblin, "Holy Spirit" in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis, 1993), 463-4.

from starvation and curable diseases, not to mention victims of natural disasters, one is almost forced to reconsider and refashion the traditional concept of God's omnipotence along the lines of Comblin above. A Christian also has to face the issue of the redemption of the world and the coming of Christ (a fundamental issue of difference between Christians and Jews). As Didier Pollefeyt notes: "Christians must agree with Jews that the world is not yet redeemed".[61] On the one hand, I want to maintain God's omnipotence in order for transcendence and redemption to be possible for the lost, broken lives of this world. Remove that possibility, and life for so many is extinguished of all meaning. Theism is tarnished irrevocably. Christians turning to the gospels and gazing upon Jesus on the cross, see a power that eschews the sword but becomes a victim and martyr. Jesus' subsequent resurrection and His bringing the Reign of God into sacred fruition, do not cease the groans and cries of many victims. So many souls continue to thirst and crave for redemption and healing in this world, often futilely.

Speaking of Jesus's kenotic (self-emptying) life of love (that does not culminate on the cross but continues with the gift of the Spirit) testifies to a power far removed from the might of military empires. Such a self-giving, or renouncing[62] love, is not passive, as John Howard Yoder has argued by highlighting Jesus's acts of non-violent resistance. Such power testifies to the "violence of love", as Oscar Romero remarked. The power therefore is not denied, but it is a power rooted in the scandal of the cross. Note also that Comblin and Ellacuría share much in common with Irving Greenberg's notion that the covenant has evolved so that one speaks today of humanity having more responsibility in establishing and evoking the presence of God among us. Similarly, the gospels also accentuate the role of the healed in receiving a cure at Jesus's touch or word. It is their faith that saves.[63] Without this faith, few miracles happen, as at Nazareth.[64] Therefore, because no clear 'saving' occurs for many in this life, I will need to address further below the problem of post-mortem redemption and God's omnipotence.

In continuing this attempt at dialogue, I will first examine how the theodicies from Part Two responded to or challenged some of the above assertions and how

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61. Didier Pollefeyt, "The Church and the Jews: Unsolvable Paradox or Unfinished Story?", in *Nostra Aetate: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Christian Relations* (Christianity and History. Series of the John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies in Bologna 5), eds. Neville Lamdan and Alberto Melloni (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 142.

62. For a discussion of *kenosis* and the Buddhist term *sunyata* (emptiness), see John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian, and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 16.

63. Mk 2:5, Mk. 5:34. See also my reflection on the story of the Syrophoenician woman in the Appendix.

64. Mk 6:5.

these testimonies may interpret such responses.

III. The Responses of Theodic Works to Witnesses of Evil

A. Preliminary One: Encroaching Upon Holy Ground

This section is fraught with potential misinterpretation and the possibility of falling into insensitivity and religious hubris. Recall John D'Arcy May's remark that the "acknowledgement of failure" may be a sound basis for dialogue,[65] especially as I would contend, for the theodicist. Individuals who have suffered inordinately and witnessed horrific actions of human beings with no clear response from God cannot be refuted as in a law court or investigative inquiry. With awareness of the historical record, we must take their impressions and accounts as authentic and honest. The goal of a Christian theodicist is to draw upon the life and mission of Christ (and carefully select relevant resources within Christian tradition) to begin to work out a careful, faithful language that can remain resonant despite this world's evil. The aim is to provide a framework to begin to give meaning to each life as a whole and to instil a means to cope with suffering and trauma. Because Jesus for Christians is considered both a fellow "sufferer who understands" and the God of Mercy and Justice, Christians have unlimited resources to plumb the depths of meaning that Christ can be the source for redemption and for personal connection. Obviously these statements or challenges are posed in fear and trembling as much as they are sustained and enriched by one's faith.

B. Preliminary Two: What Theodicists Cannot Offer

As we saw in Chapter Two, Alicia Partnoy can only look to herself and her fellow prisoners for 'bread' and rescuing. For Nomberg-Przytyk, faith is madness in the concentration camps. Theoretical theodicy can offer little tangible means of bread or liberation, though a theodicy must not simply try to justify why belief in God is still reasonable without also advocating and illustrating how that faith is made manifest in acts of love and mercy. Theodicists seek to argue why belief in a loving God despite evil is still reasonable and necessary. A theodicist should not, therefore, delve too deeply into the sordid business of justifying specific concrete events as part of God's plan or as a sign of divine punishment. Theodicies have their limits, and one needs to be cognisant of them, though like Greenberg, or some liberation theologians, they can seek to empower their readers and listeners to commit

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65. John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian, and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 134.

themselves to a praxis that seeks to heal the sufferer. Such a moral and philosophical outlook could give a sufferer the means, support, and vocabulary to persevere through the torture and suffering, provide a way to combat the ideology of the perpetrators, and come to see the goodness and meaning of this world. The fact that there are individuals who have been aided by such an outlook and connection with others through their faith provides some tangible 'proof'. As I will repeat below, a non-believer in God can also point to theists who were corrupted or disavowed their faith. Ignace, a Hutu convicted of genocide, remarks: "The white priests took off at the first skirmishes. The black priests joined the killers or the killed. God kept silent, and the churches stank from abandoned bodies…For a little while, we were no longer ordinary Christians, we had to forget our duties learned in catechism class".[66] A theodicy can only be fruitful if its accepts its limits, failures, and fragility.

C. The Value of a Humble, Dynamic Faith

While humility is an essential component of any religious position, a dynamic faith is able to adapt in some way to changing times or contexts and to co-opt what is attractive in other fields but often neglected in one's own. A dynamic and humble faith listens to the assertions and claims of these witnesses and begins the process of self-examination to seek forgiveness. It also aims to maintain or clarify the integrity of one's faith while searching for more consistent moral approaches when facing new and dangerous threats or challenges.

We saw this process examined in Zachary Braiterman's interpretation of Jewish post-Holocaust theologians, as he asserts how they subtly and sometimes, radically, encroached upon unfamiliar or less-travelled territory in Judaism, or spotlighted traditionally marginal figures or textual passages to accentuate such meaning and 'answers' in a post-Holocaust, Jewish context. Irving Greenberg, for example, accentuated the role of an evolving covenant between God and the Jewish people. While the onus of responsibility had once been heavily upon God, Greenberg contends it is now more and more humanity's concern and obligation. More radically, David Blumenthal seems to say to a Partnoy or Nomberg-Przytyk that what they suffered is an injustice and God should be held accountable, but if they can see beyond this legitimate pain and isolation, God can be found amidst and beyond their affliction. Not every adaptation will have sufficient continuity with its core tradition, but those that do will subsequently be in a better position to respond authentically to contemporary problems.

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66. Ignace, interviewed by Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 142.

D. The Flexibility of Theological Protest

Just as dynamic religion can meet some of the challenges posed by non-believers, a similar means of connection or dialogue between these theologians and our witnesses to radical evil is possible through the tradition of theological protest. In Chapter Eight I traced the role of theological protest in the Jewish tradition through Anson Laytner's *Arguing With God: A Jewish Tradition.* We have also seen protest given similarly qualified support and credibility by John Paul II and the liberation theologians. This type of protest resonates with many of Partnoy and Nomberg-Przytyk's statements that such conditions are absurd and can in no way be a punishment by God or an intended part of some divine plan. With Partnoy and Nomberg-Przytyk, theodicists decry the scandal of these horrors and urge the need to work for change. The difference between a Partnoy and a Berkovits, of course, is that Berkovits protests to God as a type of prayer with the hope and faith that God will, in some way, respond. This theological protest is rooted in love of God and God's calling to love and respect the stranger and the neighbour. As Darrell Fasching writes of the Jewish tradition of protest: "It is an instinctive response rooted in compassion for one's neighbour, for the stranger, and even for one's enemy; it is so strong and compelling that one is willing to wrestle with God in order to demand justice".[67] Such a stance is one way for theodicists to respond meaningfully to the cries and accusations of some victims and not fall prey to being complicit in injustice, as Partnoy warned of the priests in Argentina who blessed the military junta.

E. The Call for Praxis and Change

In addition to the candid acknowledgement of the scandal of horrific suffering and the questions and protests that can be spoken by both believer and non-believer, is the call for tangible action to work for change and justice. Such a praxic-focus and aim contributes to how one views and contributes to the goodness and beauty of this world, a crucial task of any theodicy, as seen from the emphasis of Greenberg's working principle; Fackenheim's *Tikkun Olam*; John Paul II's calling to share in the redemption of the world completed by Christ through our attitude to our own suffering and the suffering of others; and the option for the poor and the commitment to work for individual and structural change in liberation theology. It is no surprise that Partnoy, for example, refers to fellow friends and workers for justice who were sustained and led by their religious faith. Néstor Junquera and María

67. Fasching, *Narrative Theology*, 75.

Eugenia González de Junqueray shared many of Partnoy's same goals and visions for a better Argentina. As Partnoy writes of Néstor: "He, Christian, to the marrow of his bones, found the tools to fight injustice in the Theology of Liberation".[68] Part of Partnoy wishes she could share the same conviction in those tools, or the Jewish faith of her ancestors, but as noted in Chapter Two, she is unable to do so, in part because she also sees how high members of the church supported the military junta in Argentina. Nevertheless, the example of Néstor and María stays with her.

One of the best testaments to the vitality and integrity of a religion are its believers working on the side of justice and sharing the fate of the poor and the oppressed while bulwarked and sustained by their faith. Néstor and María embody this ideal, though, like many, they greatly suffered for it. According to Partnoy, they "were taken away in the middle of December 1976. Nothing more is known of them, though a writ of habeas corpus was filed".[69] While such stories are tragic, the lives and martyrdoms of Rabbi Akiba, Karl Leisner, Maximillian Kolbe, Ignacio Ellacuría, and the "primordial holiness" of the poor and oppressed as Sobrino argues, clearly position those religious believers on the side of the oppressed and testify and give credibility to their theological beliefs in following and worshipping a God of love and justice.

F. A Disinterested, Other-Centred Faith

While not unique to the Christian faith, a theodicist may also point to an outlook of faith which acknowledges that being a Christian does not shield one from the horrors and tragedies of this life, but in certain situations, makes one more susceptible to the threat and reality of evil. This realisation is linked with the concomitant Christian belief that some suffering (the martyrdom of Oscar Romero, for example) could be a means to participate in furthering the goals of Christ's mission. Such a stance could also help provide the spiritual and theological resources to sustain one's sense of identity (and sanity). It also could, in theory, be another tool to help an individual who has had his or her faith severely challenged or even renounced it at the onslaught of horrific suffering. But again, I have argued (contra Phillips) that to make this disinterested faith (or other-centred faith) effective, a Christian would need to connect it with Christ's life and example and the meaning ascribed to his crucifixion and resurrection. Such a connection testifies to the saving grace and mercy of God. It points the way to our purpose and essence and reveals the extent a personal God will go to combat the degradation committed by

68. Partnoy, *The Little School*, 62.
69. Ibid., 129.

human beings and so calls for a love of self that expresses one's theological and moral identity primarily through loving and serving others. Its hope and aim point to the possibility for the salvation of all, so that one's disinterested faith still brims with hope in God's promise of the beatific vision while striving to keep one's faith despite setbacks, and even horrors, in this world. Partnoy, of course, could not understand this type of faith in her friends, but their memory and commitment caused her to reflect favourably on them years later.

G. Emphasising Christ as Healer

The most important resource a Christian theodicist can give a sufferer is the witness of Christ in the gospels. For a Christian, the story of Christ as a fellow sufferer who is God Incarnate can endow one's life with meaning and purpose. It can provide inspiration and strength, particularly if a person sees that Christ was persecuted and murdered for his choice to side with the poor and outcast and his challenge of those who oppressed others. *Gaudium Et Spes* proclaims: "Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue, and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not be served".[70]

In Chapter Two I presented the life and testimony of Christ as a fellow sufferer for other victims of trauma and persecution to identify with. In addition, Jesus's moral message would clearly resonate in principle with Partnoy, Nomberg-Przytyk, and Gyatso who all sought justice and aimed for a conversion of our world. That a Christian thinker, like Bonhoeffer claims that the Holy Spirit's presence ensures one is not alone, and that potentially, such suffering can be a means to participate in Christ's redemption, could also bring comfort and peace to many.[71] It can also attest to why this world has meaning and value and how God is calling all of us to participate in Jesus's redemptive work. In particular, the Christology of the liberation theologians, which sees in Jesus someone who embodies the prophetic calling of the option for the poor in the Hebrew Bible, sanctifies the marginalised and voiceless of this world and calls on everyone, radically, to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Christ. Such 'following', while not severed from communion with the Church, is best glimpsed in the inclusive sayings of the Beatitudes and in Matthew: "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did for

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70. *Gaudium et Spes*, in *The Documents of Vatican* II, ed. Walter M. Abbott, S.J., trans. Very Rev.
Msgr. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 3(201).

71. "I believe that God can and will bring good out of evil, even out of the greatest evil. For that purpose he needs men who make the best use of everything. I believe that God will give us all the strength we need to help us to resist in all times of distress" [Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethage (Touchstone: New York, 1997), 11].

me".[72] Such a faith can at least provide a moral philosophy to help thwart total despair. As such it could be useful to an atheist or agnostic like Partnoy and Nomberg-Przytyk, though, perhaps less so in the case of Gyatso, who turns to his own rich resources and cultural traditions that were the cause of his own persecution.

H. The Beauty of This World and Creation

Lastly, a theodicy that speaks of the innate goodness and dignity of all human beings through God's creation resonates with hope. It testifies to the purpose of every human being. It also highlights how far astray some individuals have fallen from their inherent dignity, while keeping open the possibility for redemption and transformation.

There must then be a way to reject those acts that aim to destroy the beauty and integrity of creation while still siding with the narrator's comment in Genesis that "God saw all that He had made, and found it very good".[73] Some people may argue that the world has lost all meaning and value or never had meaning because of

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72. For relevant works on post-Holocaust Christologies examining the issues of the Jewishness of Jesus; the question of a single, double, or alternative covenant model; the moral errors of supersessionist theology (also known as the theology of substitution); the important and clear distinctions between "Christologies of Discontinuity" as opposed to "Christologies of Continuity", the "end of christological salvation triumphalism" [Didier Pollefeyt, "Christology After Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective", in *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 233]; the moral, historical and theological errors (and repercussion) of the deicide charge against the Jewish people, the expectations and fulfillment of the Messiah, and the "newness" and uniqueness of Christ in light of the on-going Jewish covenant, see John Pawlikowski, "The Search for a New Paradigm for the Christian-Jewish Relationship: A Response to Michael Singer" in *Reinterpreting Revelation and Tradition: Jews and Christians in Conversation*, eds. John T. Pawlikowski and Hayim Goren Perelmuter (Franklin: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 25-48; John Pawlikowski, *Jesus and the Theology of Israel* (Wilmingon: Michael Glazer, Inc.) 1989; John Pawlikowski, *Christ in the Light of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); Didier Pollefeyt, "The Church and the Jews: Unsolvable Paradox or Unfinished Story?", in *Nostra Aetate: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Christian Relations* (Christianity and History. Series of the John XXIII Foundation for Religious Studies in Bologna 5), eds. Neville Lamdan and Alberto Melloni (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2007), 131-144; Didier Pollefeyt, "Christology After Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective", in *Jesus Then & Now: Images of Jesus in History and Christology*, eds. Marvin Meyer and Charles Hughes (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 229-248; *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God? In Search of An Alternative for the Theology of Substitution*, ed. Didier Pollefeyt (Louvain: Peeters, 1997); *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes: Rabbis and Scholars Engage an Ancient Brother in a New Conversation*, ed. Bruteau, Beatrice (New York: Orbis, 2003); Elena Procario Foley, "Heir or Orphan: Theological Evolution and Devolution before and after *Nostra Aetate*" in *Vatican II Forty Years Late*, ed. William Madges (New York: Orbis, 2006), 308-339; Peter J. Haas, "Judaism in Protestant Encounters With the Shoah" [With Critiques and Response], in *Fire in the Ashes*: *God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, eds. David Patterson and John K. Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 59-83; Michael S. Kogan, *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *The Catholic Church and the Jewish People: Recent Reflections From Rome*, eds. Philip A. Cunningham, Norbert J. Hofman, and Joseph Sievers (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

73. Genesis 1:31

Auschwitz or the actions of a rapist or the sudden death of a loved one. However, as Fackenheim's 614th commandment similarly argues, such a position inadvertently cedes inordinate power or 'victory' to those individuals who aimed – but ultimately failed – to sully all the goodness of this world and to imprint the world in their distorted image. While Fackenheim is speaking specifically in the context of Jewish belief and identity, such a 'commandment' can be extended to all theists.

Moreover, atrocities must not be given the symbolic potency to impugn every person who has been – and will be – created. As Elie Wiesel writes: "To say that every one of them could have become a killer is to indict the whole world. It is to compare the privileged kapos with the moribund *muselmänner*. . .It is to punish the innocent who have been punished enough".[74]

Making a case for the overall goodness of the world need not diminish the value and witnessing of those lives ended prematurely or savagely. Such lives highlight further what should have been the type of life and death all deserve. Remembering such lives also helps to restore the shock and reality that human beings have played a definitive role in preventing this possibility for so many. However, some evil definitely raises questions of the value of this world for certain individuals who have suffered needlessly and horrendously. The existence of such evil is where a religious believer must concede defeat based solely on the recourse of limited justice and reparation in this world. Because this reality for many has not been realised, Christians revisit the tradition of God's creation of the world and God's response to suffering and evil. Based especially on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, Christians assert how God will redeem all suffering as the beatitudes testify: "Blest are those who mourn, for they will be comforted…Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven".[75]

Such a world is fostered and focused on the Kingdom of God within and beyond our midst. And so, while never tiring in the commitment to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, a Christian must also look to the afterlife and the individual's encounter with God for true redemption and transformation. Phillips denied such a possibility, while McCord Adams accentuated this encounter with God and the size gap and qualities of God that make it plausible to believe God could heal and redeem the pernicious concrete and symbolic effects of such life-defeating evils. She does not speculate in detail on what the encounter will be like,

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74. Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full: Memoirs 1969* - (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 347.

75. Mt 5:4;5:11.

though a Christian could turn to the Scriptures and tradition for hints of which direction to take. Again, for a Christian, the answer and key is both the Christ of Mercy, comfort to the sinner – "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do" – and the Christ of Justice, companion to the oppressed and suffering of this world, who tells some perpetrators: "it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea".[76] How to address these seemingly conflictive titles will be addressed below.

IV. Afterlife Dilemmas: Identity, Atrocity, Judgement, and God's Embrace

A. A Test Case for Universal Salvation

In a recent account of Sudan's devastating civil-war, one of the lost boys of Sudan, Alepho Deng, recalls an encounter with a five-and-a-half year old girl who had "hobbled up to [him] like a weak and wounded gazelle". Curious about her condition, he asked a relative, Angong, about her. Because Alepho was then six-and-a-half years old and so "nearly a man and this is a time of war", Angong told him the girl's story. During a raid on their village, an attacker tried to take the girl with him while she "clung to a small bush screaming in terror so it was difficult for him to remove her hands.

> 'You a stupid little girl,' the man shouted. 'I will give you the medicine you will never forget.' He stooped over her and pulled out his penis. We screamed but there was nothing her mother or I could do. They had us tied lying on our stomachs and held us back with guns. The man tried to dig his penis into the girl, but he couldn't get it in while he was holding her down too. He got up and tied her hands to the small bush. He pushed it in and pushed and pushed on her with his full weight. At first she struggled and screamed, but a few minutes later the loud cries stopped. The little girl had passed out.[77]

Without minimising the need for justice in this world and the calling to heal victims like that little girl, I want to examine two opposing afterlife claims within Christianity while keeping in mind such victims of atrocity. It is my contention that theodicy (and so credible theism) needs to retain the possibility for 'hell', though I do not pretend to have any definitive explanation of what 'hell' is or how it 'operates'. I also agree with Didier Pollefeyt's assertion that "After Auschwitz, the

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76. Mt 18:6

77. Alephonsion Deng, *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys From Sudan*, Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak with Judy A.

theological task is to avoid both *apokatastasis* and Manicheanism [characterised by a clear division of 'us' (as holy) and 'them' (as evil) with no possibility for forgiveness]; it is to keep God's justice and mercy in tension, to experience and think about them together".[78] What follows, therefore, in the next few sections is an attempt to maintain this tension while focusing on a victim of atrocity's post-mortem encounter with God. My main concern is examining the context for articulating how the suffering and crushed of this world could be healed while grappling with the issues of identity, memory, forgiveness, and justice. To do so, I also want to examine how and whether universal salvation (*apokatastasis*) in particular solves or exacerbates the theodicy problem.

Without seeking to downplay the "power of God's love",[79] I also want to examine the claim that if post-mortem humanity is still recognisably ante-mortem humanity, then it is likely there will be individuals who reject God, who choose sin, and who imprison themselves in extreme egotistical, narcissistic hatred of all that is good and all that has the potential to heal. While not necessarily Dante's Inferno, hell is everything one creates and chooses for oneself against God's will. It is a distorted mirror of one's distorted desires. Or as Ronald Paulson writes: "Hell is the interface of suffering-evil and doing-evil".[80]

Bear in mind that reflecting upon the post-mortem encounter with God is of pre-eminent importance in the context of atrocity and theodicy. Remove the possibility for this encounter as Phillips wants to contend, and every theodicy collapses. As I have argued, there can be no meaningful theism without striving to develop a viable theodicy.

B. Together At Last in Heaven: Hitler, the Devil, and the Blessed Mother

Advocates of *apokatastasis panton* (the restoration of all things) point to a few Scriptural passages that may speak of God redeeming all evil. Origen is usually cited as a main early proponent of universalism,[81] while some contemporary advocates

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Bernstein (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 97-8.

78. Didier Pollefeyt, "In Response to Peter J. Haas and Juergen Manemann", in *After-Words: Post-Holocaust Struggles with Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Justice*, eds. David Patterson and John Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 78-9.

79. Didier Pollefeyt, "Forgiveness After the Holocaust" in *After-Words: Post-Holocaust Struggles with Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Justice*, 70.

80. Paulson, *Sin and Evil*, 48.

81. Origen writes: "When it is said that the 'last enemy [the devil] shall be destroyed', it is not to be understood that his substance, which is God's creation, perishes, but that his purpose and hostile will perishes; for this does not come from God, but from himself. Therefore his destruction does not mean his ceasing to exist but ceasing to be an enemy and ceasing to be death. Nothing is impossible to Omnipotence; there is nothing that cannot be healed by its Maker" [*De Principiis* in *The Early Christian Fathers,* ed. and trans. Henry Bettenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 257].

include Thomas Talbot, Marilyn McCord Adams,[82] and Jürgen Moltmann. Not surprisingly, the Bible is cited by proponents and sceptics of universal salvation.

While Moltmann, for example, notes that the term '*apokatastasis panton*' only appears in Acts 3:21[83] but does not clearly refer to universal salvation, he contends that he finds other scriptural passages that seem to refute the notion of "a judgment with a double outcome". He cites passages like Ephesians 1:10 – "to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth"; Colossians 1.20 – "to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross"; and Philippians 2:10 "...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".[84] Others like Thomas Talbot focus on Paul's epistle to the Romans.[85]

One could respond that from Paul's letter to the Colossians, Paul does admit that Christ enables us to "be holy and blameless and irreproachable before him". However, there is an important stipulation: "provided that [we] continue securely established and steadfast in the faith" (Col.1:23). This additional clause is imperative: one must maintain holiness; otherwise, one cannot be presented as holy and blameless. Similarly, while the quote above from Ephesians could be used for universal salvation, the same letter more clearly proclaims: "Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater) has any inheritance in the kingdom of God" (5:5). Lastly, the epistle to the Philippians also notes: "For many live as the enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction" (3:18-9). The vagueness in the language "of all things" which Moltmann cites, therefore, is given more concrete sentencing elsewhere in the epistles.

Of the passages Moltmann quotes, the one from Philippians 2:10 is the most interesting. I cannot envisage someone confessing "Jesus Christ is Lord" in any meaningful sense without then embarking on the path to salvation. In this light, one

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82. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous*, 127.

83. Moltmann rightly notes that Peter's use in *Acts* of the phrase "the restoration of all things" cannot be cited as biblical support for universal salvation. While the passage seems to imply that such a claim originated with the prophets, Peter adds: "Moses said...And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people" (Acts 3:23).

84. Jürgen Moltmann, *Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2004), 240-1.

85. See, in particular the three essays of Thomas Talbott in *Universal Salvation: The Current Debate*, eds. Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 1-52.

would have to make sense of what Paul refers to by 'confession' above.[86] In Mark's gospels, the demons and evil spirits recognise Christ (1:24; 5:7), but they certainly do not love and worship him. At his command, their 'knees' may bend, but not their 'hearts' and 'minds'. In light of the other Pauline passages, however, it seems the act of confessing Jesus's divine status does not guarantee salvation.

If there is a cohesive and sustained message of universal salvation in the Bible, I remain sceptical.[87] Someone may want to desire universal salvation, but the Bible is not exactly one's best advocate and grounding. However, universalists raise important philosophical and moral issues which attests to their position's appeal and are ones theodicists must address.

C. Why Universalism Remains Rhetorically Powerful

The Bible's ambiguous support of universalism does not completely disprove a universalist's provocative challenges. Thomas Talbot, for example, asks how people can be condemned to hell if they remain held captive by some disordered desire or ignorance. He contends if one is not fully informed and capable of accepting or rejecting God, then any punishment would be unjust and irrational. Talbot challenges: "Do you really believe that the difference between you and the world's worst criminals, lies in the superior character of your own free choices?"[88] It is a "dreadful" question, like Solzhenitsyn's, who writes: "And just so we don't go around flaunting too proudly the white mantle of the just, let everyone ask himself: If my life had turned out differently, might I not have become just such an executioner?"[89]

While these are humbling questions, a theodicist must support the notion of our fundamental autonomy and responsibility in order to avoid tainting everyone as equally culpable. Of what value and goodness is creation if everyone can be a murderer and willing participant in genocide? How can one speak of the Holy Spirit as an "agency-enabler" as Adams writes, if forces of darkness will always overcome our divine calling to be loving and self-giving? As the atheist Primo Levi, echoing the theist Wiesel above, remarks:

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86. Thomas Talbott cites J.B. Lightfoot to contend that the Greek verb that Paul uses for confessing also connotes praise and thanksgiving when used throughout the Septuagint. See his "Christ Victorious", in *Universal Salvation*, 23.

87. To his credit, Moltmann also cites various passages from the Gospels and the Pauline letters that "address a double outcome" like the story of Dives and Abraham in Luke 16.23 or the notion of an "everlasting fire that is not quenched" in Mark 9:48. However, he concludes that "universal salvation *and* a double outcome of judgment are therefore both well attested biblically". I am less convinced of this claim.

88. Thomas Talbott, "Reply to my Critics", in *Universal Salvation*, 260.

89. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956*, trans. Thomas P. Whitney

> …I know I was a guiltless victim and I was not a murderer. I know that the murderers existed, not only in Germany, and still exist, retired or on active duty, and that to confuse them with their victims is a moral disease or an aesthetic affectation or sinister sign of complicity…[90]

Against Talbot, reaching a state of full knowledge about God and the capacity to choose God, still involves a desire and choice. One needs to be open to receiving and accepting such grace, which may be permanent, universal, and gratuitous,[91] but is not coercing and self-annihilating. While the conflict between God's desire that we accept such transformative knowledge and the reality of our free will may be disproportionate, one should not underestimate the human will in whose power the crematoria of Auschwitz mingles along with the moral strivings of St. Francis or Rabbi Akiba. As Monika Hellwig writes: "The encounter with the living God refines, purifies, and transforms those who are open to conversion, but destroys those who persist in asserting the self as independent of God and of God's reign in the world of creatures".[92]

Furthermore, while Talbot and other universalists argue that it is "awkward to imagine that God would send people to a hell that has the effect of hardening its occupants against him when he could, they maintain, have a hell that would educate them and draw them towards him",[93] phrasing the issue in this way is misleading. First, while one should never underestimate the enduring love of God and the possibility that the most morally-depraved individual may repent and seek forgiveness, to remove the possibility for hell not only desecrates the meaning and purpose of God's created world but undermines any theodic attempt that aims to remain faithful to the traumatised cries of victims of atrocity. Without any ultimate consequences, without the divine judgement of those individuals who have brazenly, and without remorse, committed acts of atrocity, cries of victims from atrocities like the Holocaust or Rwandan genocide are doubly ignored and doubly violated. Thus, the connections among autonomy, responsibility, and consequences are severed.

Secondly, who is to say that hell is not self-punishment instituted by one's deluded, self-insistence to reject God? The onus here should not be on God but the

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(The Harvill Press: London, 1995), 75.

90. Quoted in David Hirsch, "Critique [of Didier Pollefeyt's essay "The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust"], in *Ethics After Auschwitz: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses.* St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 253.

91. See John P. Galvin, "Sin and Grace", in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives,* 137.

92. Monika K. Hellwig, "Eschatology", in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Volume* II, eds. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 368.

93. Robin Parry and Christopher Partridge, *Universal Salvation*, xxviii.

individuals who have made themselves impervious to God's embrace. Such a response, however, calls us to compassion, and to try to understand why certain people commit atrocious acts. We may employ various psychoanalytic and psychological approaches and bear in mind that our genetic make-up (as some evolutionary psychologists may claim) and our social and familial environment often play a crucial role in how we mold our character.[94] Although spoken in a political context, Rousseau's famous remark: "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains", remains fairly accurate today from a theological, psychological, economic, and political standpoint. Nevertheless, the majority of us are blessed (and burdened) with enough capacity for choice to exercise our free will through deliberation, intention, and action so as to be (in some way) responsible for what we do to others and ourselves.

Moreover, even if hell were conceived as a means of educating victims, this would still not determine that all victims would choose to accept and integrate such values, especially if continuity of identity is maintained.

D. On Earth As It Is Not In Heaven?

In Chapter Five McCord Adams argued how God's imagination and boundless love "will convince us"[95] of the overall value and goodness of our lives. If anyone, God could persuade us to change our ways and thoughts, but questions remain about the context, approach, and meaning of such 'convincing'. One of the key issues here is what would make individuals desire in heaven what they may not have desired on earth if such persons are recognisably the same people, and God does not coerce conversion. In response to the Sadducees' convoluted and deceitful question about the woman who had been married to seven brothers through the practice of levirate marriage, Jesus tells them that the "worthy" (Mt 21:34) will be like angels in heaven and so there will be no marrying (Mk 12:25).[96]

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94. For an overview of perspectives on the causes and nature of evil from some of the prominent figures in evolutionary psychology, evolutionary biology, psychoanalysis, social theory, feminist theory, liberation theology, and other sources, see Terry D. Cooper, *Dimensions of Evil: Contemporary Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

95. Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evil*, 127.

96. The Sadducees began their attempted conundrum (after the Pharisees had asked Jesus the "tax" question) by referring to the tradition of levirate marriage as proscribed by Moses in order to ground their argument in Scripture. The dilemma was as follows: a woman's husband died without their having a child. And so the husband's brother married her, but he also died before there was a child. So the next brother married her with the same result: his death and no child. In the end, she had been married to all seven brothers until she died, too, childless. The Sadducees, no doubt with an imperceptible smile on their lips, asked Jesus: "In the resurrection whose wife will she be?" They did, of course, not believe in the resurrection and so the question was only to try to entice Jesus to speak against Moses. Jesus, ever the rhetorician, first refers to the passage of the burning bush in Exodus and replies that God is the God of the living and not

This passage implies we will be qualitatively different beings (at least in some aspects) in heaven. However, as Phillips[97] also noted: if we are like angels, are we therefore no longer like us? And if we are no longer like us, then what or who are we? The post-mortem encounter, it seems, becomes even more opaque and impossible to speculate about. Moreover, if our pre-mortem identities and relationships are seemingly distinct from our post-mortem ones, then the value of this world is again brought into question. This world formed who we are. If this identity is so radically changed, what was the purpose of enduring this world's tragedies?

Perhaps, the dissolution of marriage (and thus a part of some individuals' identities, as Phillips maintained) cuts to the root of the universalist argument: everyone is created in the image of God, everyone is loved by God, and everyone is called to God and is redeemed by the blood of the cross. Distinctions fade away. In this sense, the language of "saint" and "innocent" may seem problematic and irrelevant, an issue I will now address below.

E. Why We Need to Retain the 'Innocent' and the 'Saint'

To be clear: even saints are not always perfect, and even murderers are in need of "spiritual care", as Colonel Montua of the Police Regiment Center wrote to battalion and company commanders in the context of their officers massacring Jews and concealing Nazi crimes of atrocity.[98] Moreover, recall Sobrino and Gutiérrez's

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the dead and says they have therefore misread Scripture. He then makes his comment about no marriage in heaven. Also note that the cultural practice of the levirate marriage was not only to ensure the original husband's line would not end, but also to be a means to protect the widow, who in the ancient world, had little to no opportunity to earn 'honest' wages. The book of Ruth beautifully illustrates Naomi and Ruth's dilemma without a suitable husband for Ruth (until Ruth happened to gleam in the field of her husband's kinsman, Boaz. The rest, of course, is salvation history). A contemporary reading of this story could also stress how Jesus's response 'emancipated' the woman as the Sadducees' question implicitly referred to who would control or own the woman: "Whose wife is she?" According to Leonard Swidler, Jesus's rejection of divorce (except on the grounds of adultery) was to insist that "both the man and the woman were to have the same rights and responsibilities in their relationship toward each other" [*Jesus Was a Feminist: What the Gospels Reveal About His Revolutionary Perspective* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2007), 28]. Also remember that the unidentified woman, because she was childless, was shuffled from one brother to the next until she, too, died. The fact that she is childless after all these marriages would point to her own barrenness, which was often deemed a punishment of God. So, one could see how a passage like this could be a text of female emancipation. Either way, a scribe asked Jesus another question and the conversation changed.

In truth, I never liked Jesus's response to the Sadducees. For the nameless woman referred to in the challenge, no marriage in heaven is probably a good thing. What if she liked the third brother the best? Things would not be heavenly for all. But for, let's say, Rebecca and Isaac, or Eurydice and Orpheus, I find it interesting that in Catholic terms the sacrament of marriage seems annulled in the afterlife, and some people's idea of heaven would be denied.

97. Phillips, *The Problem of God*, 88-90.

98. Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper 1998), 14.

honest assessment of the poor: they too, are often sinners.[99] And as Didier Pollefeyt writes: "[Post-Holocaust ethics] should deal with the complex genesis of good and evil, and the daily steps that eventually lead to demonic or heroic acts, steps that ultimately bring each of us to be moral or immoral human beings".[100] As my qualified support of the *privatio boni* tradition shows, I believe in the inherent dignity of every human person made in the image of God which calls for the hope and belief that even the most depraved human being can repent. Such a hope also recognises that some perpetrators, for example, have been mentally ill, or have been victims themselves, as former child soldier Ishmael Beah testified in front of the UN Economic and Social Council: "I have been rehabilitated now, so don't be afraid of me. I am not a soldier anymore; I am a child".[101] Although we need to overcome the temptation to demonise an individual (avoiding what Pollefeyt calls Manichaenism above, and elsewhere diabolisation[102]), I believe there are examples of genuine innocence and goodness and sufficient responsibility and autonomy to hold most of us accountable for what we do. I do not know what I would do in a situation like the Rwandan genocide, but I know there have been those who have acted morally, if not heroically and nobly. Because of them, we must especially question those who concocted, organised, and unleashed the terror. Those caught up in the whirlwind may be a different matter.

In Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, he asks: "How will we disentangle those who are innocent from those who are blameworthy in the knotted histories of individuals, let alone the narratives of whole cultures and nations? The longer the conflict continues, the more both parties find themselves sucked into the vortex of mutually reinforcing victimization, in which the lone party appears more virtuous only because, being weaker, it has less opportunity to be cruel".[103] While Volf's specific context in this quote is the theology of forgiveness amidst the Balkan wars, I am interested in how Volf speaks of innocence within such conflicts for the purpose of my discussion of the afterlife. For Volf, the dichotomy of victim/victimiser is problematic as a "blameless victim" is only one who may not have the opportunity to be cruel. "No one is exempt",[104] as he writes, for "no one is exempt of sin". In Volf's theology, admitting our solidarity in sin becomes a further

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99. Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (New York: Orbis, 2004), 74.

100. Didier Pollefeyt, "The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust: Response", in *Ethics After Auschwitz: Perspectives, Critiques, and Responses* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 279.

101. Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, 199.

102. Pollefeyt, "The Kafkaesque World", 213.

103. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 103.

means of recognising our need for others and God. There is no presumed goodness, "no escape from noninnocence, either for victim or perpetrator or for a third 'party'".[105] He also distinguishes between equality and solidarity in sin,[106] denying the polarity of good and evil by stressing that no one should be excluded. He writes: "The answer I hope would be that at the core of the Christian faith lies the persuasion that the 'others' need not be perceived as innocent in order to be loved, but ought to be embraced even when they are perceived as wrongdoers".[107]

These are moving and powerful assertions. And in a conflict, especially a civil war, where atrocities are committed on both sides, such an outlook would seem to be the most helpful and practical towards achieving some type of stability, peace, and tentative embrace. What I object to is his unequivocal placement of all of us as sinners without more clarification or nuance. As Solzhenitsyn challenges, I may become such a perpetrator under certain conditions, and that is a powerful and humbling notion, but there have been individuals, tested by such fires, who, miraculously or doggedly, have stepped out (basically) unscathed.[108] To assert the great moral force of their lives we need to highlight the role of freedom and responsibility. And once we do that, we then must deal with those who have willingly committed heinous acts without remorse.

Recall Himmler's speech on October 4, 1943 to his subordinates: "Most of you know what it means to see a hundred corpses lie side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand. To have endured this – and excepting cases of human weakness – to have remained decent, that is what has made us hard. In our history, this is an unwritten and never-to-be-written page of glory".[109] One could dissect and analyse such a speech ad infinitum. And perhaps, Himmler has since acknowledged his sins before God. But as Wiesel notes: "In truth we have not left the kingdom of the night. Or rather: It refuses to let us go. It is inside us. They wait for us. They help us by forcing us to appreciate things and sensations at their just value. They are judging us".[110] If the dead victims are judging us, they are no doubt judging the likes of Himmler, too. Jesus did not say anything to the other criminal who rebuked him. Maybe there was a conversion in the afterlife; maybe for Himmler, too. But without a Saul-like conversion, if Himmler is still to be Himmler, his salvation, which may

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104. Ibid., 81.
105. Ibid., 84.
106. Ibid., 82.
107. Ibid., 85.
108. See, for example, Joseph M. Malham, *By Fire Into Light: Four Catholic Martyr of the Nazi Camps* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002).
109. Quoted in Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, 186.
110. Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full*, 254.

be a hope for some, is no guarantee as the universalists would claim. Moreover, if the suffering of victims, who are often nameless and voiceless (like the little girl encountered at the opening of this chapter), are to be healed, some tangible meaningful act of God is necessary to right such wrongs. Such a meaningful response may lead to profound transformation for both victim and perpetrator, but it may also mean there will be grinding of teeth. Either way, such justice will not be enough. For everyone, but especially for the victims and those perpetrators of atrocities who seek forgiveness, there is the desperate need for divine embrace.

F. God's Embrace

In this section, I will not speculate on God's encounter with a Mao or Hitler, though these remarks could pertain to a perpetrator of atrocity who has expressed remorse for his or her deeds and seeks forgiveness.[111] As Fulgence, a Catholic 'deacon' convicted of genocide in Rwanda, remarks: "I know that only God can understand what we did. He alone has looked at every detail. He alone knows who drenched his arms and who did not. And regarding those last, it will not take Him long to count them up".[112] But especially for the innocent victim, such an encounter must be a loving embrace of transformation and healing, a space for the individual to grieve and question as much as to be solaced and receive 'answers'.

Some, for example, may contend that the encounter itself with God would heal. Meister Eckhart writes in sermon two: "Yet I declare that if ever there were a single person who in intellectual vision and in truth should glimpse for a moment the bliss and joy therein, all his sufferings and all God intended that he should suffer would be a trifle, a mere nothing to him – in fact I declare it would be pure joy and comfort

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111. What should happen to perpetrators of horrendous evil who are unrepentant? When individuals and groups romp and stomp over the lives and dignity of so many, extinguishing finite lives with a finite act with knowledge of our finite world, one could contend that the matter of griping about infinite punishment is the wrong focus. For those who have intentionally sullied and destroyed such finite lives, there is no going back for the victim in the Christian conception. There is no reincarnation. There is no meaningful, parallel sense of soul-making after death (traditional conceptions of purgatory were never depictions of earth-like existence. If so, that would be a type of rebirth). It is because one has methodically eradicated the finite lives of others that (without meaningful repentance) 'eternal' punishment would not be a disproportionate punishment. And yet the image of a loving God and the possibility for some individuals to be 'beyond' redemption, in McCord Adams's language, be unconvinced by God to repent, is also difficult for a believer in God to fathom. Moreover, what would the purpose of 'eternal' punishment be? Annihilation would seem to be a kinder act, and such annihilation could 'occur' if someone was so steeped in hatred and repentance that the self he or she was meant to be is irremediably beyond repair. As I have argued, this horrific possibility must be maintained to ensure credibility of this world and one's choice to seek and express loving-faith in God and God's creatures.

112. Fulgence, interviewed by Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 142.

to him".[113] But that is the believer speaking. The despairing and the broken deserve 'more' than the rest of us, especially if they are still dominated by such sensations during that post-mortem encounter. Such an encounter may not be a magical erasure of all that was unpleasant, or even, horrific, but it should heal and redeem.

Perhaps God reassures victims that they were loved throughout their ordeals, as Adams argues, but because the victims felt abandoned in their earthly afflictions, will any words or action in heaven completely fill that void for everyone? Recall Donat's convictions from Chapter Five. In a pastoral context, especially when addressing the most vulnerable in our world, the aim could be reaching a middle ground that emphasises God's love and power to redeem, in addition to maintaining the possibility that some experiences and memories of loss and suffering cannot be fully compensated, justified, or explained away. Such a perspective for some individuals may be spiritually and personally needed to recall and give meaning to that loss and fissure. Other individuals may instead pray for such memories to be cleansed and 'forgotten'. There have been some experiences so brutal and dehumanising that the best healing could be the gift to 'forget' them completely. After his rehabilitation from being a child soldier, Ishmael Beah writes of going dancing at a pub but suddenly being overwhelmed by horrific memories from his past: "I didn't want to talk anymore. A memory of a town we had attacked during a school dance had been triggered. I could hear the terrified cries of teachers and students, could see the blood over the dance floor. Allie tapped me on the shoulder and brought me back to the present".[114] From the standpoint of those murdered teachers and students, such a 'final' memory without healing could also be a dominant and demoralising identity-marker that overshadows any good in their lives and their ability to be healed.

In this context Miroslav Volf has written: "If our memory is made and remade of gathered fragments, the non-remembrance of suffered wrongs will not violate our sense of identity".[115] Like McCord Adams, Volf's aim is to show how healing is possible for perpetrators and victims of horrendous suffering. While his claim that memories of wrongs will "not come to mind" in heaven[116] may be one way to articulate such a possibility, I would argue it is also important to stress that one's memories are not isolated, unconnected nodes of perception so that one can simply recreate or 'forget' certain memories without repercussions to present and future

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113. Meister Eckhart, "Sermon 2", in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 38-9.

114. Beah, *A Long Way Gone*, 184.

115 Volf, *End of Memory,* 198.

identity and without severing continuity with the reality of previous memories. Some of my recollections and how I interpret them may change or be forgotten, but our identities are formed through the interpretation and retaining of certain key, fundamental memories, sometimes at a conscious or unconscious level. Remove too many of these strands and nodes, and identity becomes fractured and dissolved. For post-mortem embrace to be meaningful, a person's identity must embody honesty and integrity to one's entire life, whether as healer or sinner, victim or perpetrator, or more realistically, some medley of each.

Regardless, if the human person's identity and autonomy are to be fully respected, God must come to a victimised person more in the guise of the wind-like whisper of Elijah, or the soft night-voice heard by Samuel than in the whirlwind of Job or the terrifying spectacle of the burning bush. The role of the Incarnation and the life of Christ provide a dizzying array of possibilities to speculate about and imagine this encounter. Christians, therefore, hope that the same God (in the human person of Jesus of Nazareth) who insisted Zacchaeus come down from the tree; who wanted the little girl to eat after he raised her from the dead; who wept after Lazarus's death; who restored the Syrophoenician's daughter on account of her mother's words after his initially curt reply; who agonised in Gethsemane; and who groaned in tortuous pain on the cross; can apply the right tone, approach, and response to each individual's need.

It is this Godhead who suffers – and has tasted loss, agony, and brokenness – who, according to Christians, offers a means both to unite in intimacy and solidarity with fellow victims and provides the means and access to lead to healing and transformation. It is this belief, which again resides in a speculation anchored to Scripture and Christian tradition, which illumines the greatest hope, the most promising image for how all individuals in need of such healing and embrace can find it. Forgiveness, of course, resides at the heart of this hope.

G. Shouldn't Forgiveness Get the Last Word?

The question above is an important one, but consider Elie Wiesel's remarks at the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, as he recounts them in his memoir *And the Sea is Never Full*:

> God of forgiveness, do not forgive those who created this place. God of mercy, have no mercy on those who killed Jewish children here. Do not forgive the murderers or their accomplices whose work was to

116. Ibid., 145. In the context of the beatific vision and heaven such memories will no longer come to one's mind.

> kill....Remember the nocturnal processions of children, so many children...God of compassion, have no compassion for those who had none.[117]

These are chilling words. Wiesel was right to preface these remarks with his comment that they "will offend some Christians". John Roth speculates whether Wiesel's words would still hold for him if a perpetrator were repentant, but Roth also adds that if God were to forgive an unrepentant perpetrator, God would become "complicit with that perpetrator" and:

> [E]ven if all Holocaust perpetrators were genuinely repentant and all Holocaust victims had shown mercy, God could still not rightly grant forgiveness for the entire Holocaust. God could forgive the wrong done to God, but the victims' prerogative to grant or to withhold forgiveness for what happened to them would still be theirs and not God's.[118]

I do not know if the line separating the wrong done to God and humanity is so easily divided. In Jewish thought, a crime against an individual is a crime against God because humankind is made in the image of God. However, while Wiesel's position clearly would condemn universalism, Roth's question of the unrepentant Holocaust perpetrator is at the heart of my inquiry here.

In fact, the arguments in the previous sections were concerned with emphasising that the value and significance of God's plan for creation is not sullied or riddled with failure if some individuals are incapable and unwilling of turning to God and seeking mercy, forgiveness, and judgement. Biblically I tried to contend that few if any passages make a clear, unambiguous case for universal salvation and that passages that seem to argue against a double outcome are immediately convoluted with contradictory statements. I was also concerned with issues of personal identity and autonomy and the meaning of this world if God will simply convince all of us that life was good on the whole or prove that we must renounce our ways.

In *Evil and the Justice of God,* N.T. Wright interprets Revelation Chapters 20 and 21 to argue for hope in the creation of a new world, like ours, but without all the loss, suffering, and pain, thus overcoming any fears of total discontinuity. In such a world, we remain ourselves but are morally renewed and reinvigorated.[119] The possibility to be freed of one's inordinate resentment or loss or to be healed of one's inability to trust would indeed be heavenly for so many. Therefore, the issue is how

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117. Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full*, 194.
118. Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust*, 134.

to maintain an identity that may have been shaped by some potentially horrific or searing memories and yet be immersed in the love and mercy of God.

In *Burying the Past,* a work examining the process of peace and justice after civil conflict, Nigel Biggar states his reasons against a policy of deliberately forgetting "unredressed grievances", especially following civil conflict. He writes:

> First, some may be able to forget; but not, I think, the victims. Second, if government does not attend to the victims and their injuries, then it fails in one of its most basic political duties; for protecting and upholding victims of injury is one of the basic *raisons d'être* of the state. And third, grievances without redress tend to fester.[120]

Justice in heaven and justice on earth will necessarily be of a qualitatively different character because of the presence of God, but the issues Biggar raises would also need to be addressed in the afterlife. I have argued that a victim's identity is in part shaped by (or against) those horrific memories, and so effacing them (especially without addressing them), could distort any sense of the continuity of one's self-identity. At the same time, I have also acknowledged that some memories are so destructive and depersonalising that 'removing' them may be the greatest gift one can receive. As noted above, Miroslav Volf argues: "memories of suffered wrong will not come to the minds of the citizens of the world to come, for in it they will perfectly enjoy God and one another in God".[121] Such memories, he contends, do not shape but simply erode or paralyse one's stable identity. Immersed in bitterness and regret, they may hinder that perfect enjoyment of God and so the horror-participants are eventually freed from the imprisonment of such memories because of the context of heaven.

While such memories must be faced, it is because some victims cannot forget these traumatic atrocities, that there must be a suitable means and safe environment for the victim to come to terms with those atrocities. In light of this, I have argued the relevance of a God on the side of the victims of oppression and injustice and how we are privileged to encounter God in solidarity as a fellow sufferer through the trials and acute suffering of Jesus of Nazareth. For Christians, as Biggar adds, "It is widely recognised that, according to both the Old and New Testaments, justice is that which defends, restores, and promotes healthy community – its end is *shalom* or social well-being. Accordingly, the primary form of criminal justice is the rescue,

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119. N.T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 142.

120. Nigel Biggar, "Making Peace or Doing Justice – Must We Choose?", in *Burying the Past – Making Peace and Doing Justice After Civil Conflict*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 5.

deliverance, salvation, or vindication of the oppressed. The punishment of perpetrators is a secondary and subordinate moment in what is basically a reconstructive project".[122] Christians assert that divine justice, which is ultimately inscrutable, will perfectly encompass the above aims which Biggar articulates. Thus, for victims of mass atrocity and horrendous suffering, the encounter with God provides the means to come to accept healing, and through the moral renewal Wright discusses above, become vindicated and graced with the capability to forgive.

As Ervin Staub and Laurie Anne Pearlman write in "Healing, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness after Genocide and other Collective Violence": "Forgiveness is essential for reconciliation to take place and both arise from and contribute to healing".[123] While heaven should be a site of reconciliation and moral renewal, some people may remain closed to accepting or seeking forgiveness and so reconciliation may not always lead to an embrace of perpetrator and victim. Turning back to Wiesel, if the pain and anger (he was adamant that it was not hatred) is still vivid fifty years later, what will have to occur for reconciliation from the victims' perspective, even in a heavenly context? If a perpetrator is unrepentant, one can allege that this does not defeat the ultimate aim and good of Creation, though one should still grieve for the lost and those who stray because their decision to turn away from God and life remains a tragedy. However, what if a victim refuses or is simply unable to forgive a repentant perpetrator as Roth asks, above?

After one has been embraced by God and gifted with moral renewal, perhaps one's attitude toward the perpetrator will no doubt be changed, and so, too, may be the issue of universal salvation. Once this moral renewal occurs, we again confront the issue of individuals unable or unwilling to partake of that heavenly state. It would seem to follow that once some individuals reached such a state of moral renewal, they would not rest until their perpetrators were healed. However, even if we acknowledge that there is continuity in identity despite this moral renewal in heaven, thinking further along these lines is tantalisingly out of reach. After the renewal, in the midst of a new creation, there will also be a new language. We can only stutter and stumble through such a language here on earth, so these few words will have to suffice. Hopefully, such words can provide some solace for victims like the little girl referred to at the beginning of this work and for those like Wiesel who

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121. Wolf, *The End of Memory,* 177.

122. Biggar, "Making Peace", 12.

123. Ervin Staub and Laurie Anne Pearlman, "Healing, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness after Genocide and other Collective Violence", in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, eds. Raymond

have had to live and reflect upon their losses for so many years. Hopefully such a language and context can enable one to speak of such a girl being healed and embraced by God and for the anger and questions of a Wiesel to be justified and resolved.

H. Why Universal Salvation Sullies the Theodic Project

To conclude: after an injustice in this world, there are options to re-violate a victim by remaining silent, exacerbate the suffering through some intentional act, or to quell such suffering through solidarity with others, what Oscar Romero calls "the violence of love". This love – violent only in its passion for reconciliation and justice – becomes a response linked to knowing the past and then acting responsively and peacefully once the veil of ignorance is removed. It calls for accepting the fact that our destiny is inextricably linked with those victims' shoulders upon whom we stand tall. As James Baldwin eloquently writes: "the truth concerning the White North American experience is to be deciphered in the hieroglyphic lashed unto the Black Man's back…and this truth cannot be overcome until it is confronted".[124] While Baldwin writes of a specific discrimination, such hieroglyphics are imprinted upon all victims entombed with a truth that may not be discovered on its own. No human form of reparation or apology will right such wrongs, but recognition frees the potential for authentic communication and growth. To proclaim that all individuals will experience heavenly bliss regardless of circumstance or desire seems to mock and conceal the injustice that has already caused so much damage.

One also runs into a problem turning this hope of universal salvation into a dogma despite the possibility that some individuals could refuse forgiveness and God's embrace. When a person can rape a baby or slaughter children, no possibility is inconceivable. Regarding such an individual, Michael Stoeber writes in *Reclaiming Theodicy*:

> *[H]e or she might choose to maintain such an orientation indefinitely,* eternally languishing in his/her own immersion in self-isolationism. That is the possibility of hell. It is important that this *possibility* be included in one's theological framework. Not only is it consistent with the afterlife ideal and the human experience of the radically destructive nature of some evil, but it also secures the freedom, responsibility, and culpability of the

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G. Helmick, S.J., and Rodney L. Petersen (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002), 205.

124. James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 47.

individual in question with respect to his or her spiritual destiny and to crucial aspects of divine justice.[125]

In the end, I am not an advocate of universal salvation; dare I say, I may not even hope for everyone to be saved in the end. I am mystified when I read accounts of survivors like Immaculée Ilibagiza, who forgave the perpetrators who gruesomely slaughtered her family during the Rwandan genocide.[126] I agree that releasing such hatred and anger through the process and decision of forgiveness could be cathartic and that taking one's pound of flesh will often not heal and will not restore what was taken. Moreover, unlike the young girl referred to above, I have had no personal reason to begrudge anyone's "right" to heaven, let alone desire someone remain locked in some hell of their choosing, in perpetuity. I admit I am probably treading on thin moral ground.[127] I candidly acknowledge that these doubts do not embody the ideals of forgiveness: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". I also agree with Pollefeyt that one must condemn religious Manichaenism, that claims 'we' are the saved and 'they' are the depraved, and so forever burying perpetrators with the impossibility for repentance while the (still living) 'victim' is somehow forever incapable of committing any wrong. Even a cursory glance of the Gospels and Jesus's table fellowship with prostitutes, tax collectors, and other 'sinners' should dispel any sense that humans can unequivocally distinguish the sheep from the goats, the chaff from the straw. And yet, I believe the theodicy-project, an attempt to argue for the overall value of this world while maintaining a belief in a God of perfect love and power, is weakened – not emboldened – when everyone must be saved for any value or purpose to be maintained.

One may say who cares about some 'project'? But I am interested in the integrity of God's justice, the meaning and purpose of creation, and the finite lives smothered and annihilated in this world. Maybe I am overly concerned about a human conception of justice and I need to renounce trying to find tangible connections between our lives and identities in this world and the one beyond. But if this world does not matter; if our lives here ultimately do not impact what happens to us post-mortem (because eventually everyone must be saved); if it really is true

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125. Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005), 98-99.

126. See Immaculée Ilibagiza, with Steve Erwin, *Left to Tell, Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*, (Carlsbad, Hay House, 2006).

127. As a Catholic, of course, my stand on this issue is orthodox. As Monika Hellwig writes: "... [T]here is evidently no intention in our tradition to suggest that people are safe from the harm they can do to themselves. On the contrary, the tenacity with which church teaching has held on to the doctrine of hell testifies to the deep conviction that everything in the outcome of a human life really is at stake in the way each person uses freedom" ["Eschatology", in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, 367-8].

that I am a drastically changed being and identity in heaven; then someone tell me why God chose to become a human being and endure all that frustration, loss, suffering, and failure. Someone tell me exactly why that little girl from Sudan had to be raped and why having this freedom and responsibility is ultimately important. If there was no urgency, if in the long run, both Bartimaeus and Pilate are eventually saved, if the thieves on Jesus's right and left are both with him in paradise, then why the pleadings, the prophecies, the parables, the plight of the passion play?

Lastly, in tandem with a disinterested faith, a faith that believes without seeking earthly reward or compensation, "radical forgiveness" may be the most distinctive and essential element of a religious stance amidst the reality of suffering. As to what extent radical forgiveness should play in the context of the afterlife, I cannot help but recall victims like that little girl from Sudan above. Perpetrators of genocide like Fulgence may be right when he said: "I know that only God can understand what we did. He alone has looked at every detail. He alone knows who drenched his arms and who did not". However, I question anyone who contends that the little girl's assailant must be in heaven, especially with the possibility that he remain unrepentant without some coerced or drastic 'convincing'.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has sought to frame key questions these testimonies of mass atrocity raise and how theodicy has tried to respond or rephrase those questions or challenges. In the end, neither the theodicist nor the witness to devastating evil and suffering has the ultimate word on God. No human being can be granted that power and burden. Nevertheless, a Christian theodicist must heed and incorporate the stories of the lost and abandoned of this world into their lives and theologies. Such a commitment should test and clarify theological language to orient a theological practice that contributes towards healing. With such a practice comes the hope that one's religious faith is not a delusion but nourishes a rich, transformative context for individual and collective redemption and meaning. Likewise, those who have suffered so horrendously, including believers in God who have since felt abandoned and forsaken, must at least listen to the stories and accounts of these theodicists and the other victims who testify to God's presence and love. To close that possibility permanently could prevent the real chance for a breakthrough or change (in Catholic theology, the infusion of grace). It also may eternally (albeit unwittingly) grant to those perverse and atrocious acts a victory over any substantial or fundamental meaning of our world, our lives, and of (belief in) God.

To counter this possibility, a Christian theodicist should accentuate the life and example of Christ who reveals the tendency and bias of God to practice the core love of the stranger and oppressed, infused with a commitment to truth and compassion. For this, Jesus pays the ultimate price; though for Christians, ironically, this price provides the means and the direction to live, in ever-greater assurance, a God-infused life with the possibility for eternal life. Such a response will also look to the beginning and end of a creation suffused with the love of God in which all that is created is good with human beings fashioned in the image and likeness of God. This revelation marks humanity with a purpose and goal. Our world, however, does not often reflect these ideals, even, or especially for, a Job or Jesus of Nazareth who embody the highest notions of that destiny and moral calling on earth. Again, for many, especially because of the magnitude of mass atrocity and the existence of horrific suffering, the post-mortem encounter with a God of mercy and justice will become the lynchpin upon which the whole theodic system will turn, determining whether God and creation are ultimately good. For others, the pummelling of lives and of moral frameworks by such evil precludes the possibility for any meaningful redemption.

How to develop a viable theodic position based on sound argumentation and well-tested features, then, becomes my final task. In the next chapter, I will seek to bring together these assertions above and present a guide and interpretive framework through which to construct the problem of theodicy. The hope – and key issue – is whether such criteria does the justice of the victims, the justice of believers, and the justice of God due service.

Chapter Eleven

Five Criteria for a Viable Theodicy

> As soon as Zyclon B crystals came into contact with air, the deadly gas began to develop, spreading first at floor level and then rising to the ceiling. It was for this reason that the bottom layer of corpses always consisted of children as well as the old and the weak…[1]

> I did not know it at the time, but God was carrying me on His back when I thought I was walking by myself.[2]

I. Introduction

The two epigraphs above build upon the back-and-forth nature of the dialogue in the previous chapter between and among testimonies of mass atrocity and theodic accounts, while also embodying the conflicted, contested space within which any theodicist must labour. The first quote is from Filip Müller, an eyewitness account to the gassings and the crematoria of Auschwitz. The image is as grotesque as the observation is clinical and scientific. Such an image and reality seems to make all God-talk circumspect. The other quote is from Grace Akallo, a former child soldier of Uganda, who amidst her sufferings and torture and while desperately seeking to flee her captors, reflects upon her experiences and proclaims that God was supporting her and was present in the midst of such degradation and despair. These are the two types of extreme, polar assertions a theodicist encounters, along with the myriad and more ubiquitous "grey zones" that uncomfortably contain elements of each position. Having outlined the consequences of working within these opposing assertions in the previous chapter, in this chapter (contra Langer and others), I will argue why turning to testimonies of mass atrocity supports the task of theodicy. Drawing upon the most promising features of the theodic texts I looked at in Part Two, I will also present my five criteria for a Christian theodicy and will argue why each criterion is needed to develop a viable theodic position.[3] I am not asserting that such features solve the problem of evil nor justify the existence of all types of evil. Instead, I offer them as theological resources to support one's faith position to be

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1. Filip Müller, "*Eyewitness to Auschwitz": Ten Years in the Gas Chambers*, trans. Susanne Flatauer (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 117.

2. Grace Akallo, "Escape From the Kony Nightmare", in *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's* Children, Faith H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo (Grand Rapids: Chosen, 2007), 141.

3. Such criteria will build upon some of the points under the heading "The Responses and Challenges Theodic Works Pose to Witnesses of Evil" from the previous chapter.

more credible and reasonable in light of such atrocities. Such resources are intended to combat the assault on meaning that horrific evils inflict and enable a believer in God to turn to tested and pastorally-sensitive approaches to face such reality honestly and openly but still hope and believe in a loving God who can heal the broken lives of this world and the suffering that has crushed and humiliated so many.

II. Why Testimonies of Mass Atrocity Support Theodic Attempts

The Introduction to this work began with a quote from Rabbi Unsdorfer who questioned what right human beings had to try to understand God's ways.[4] In my context, such a quote questions the moral right and value to engage in theodicy and prudently stresses the severity and inevitable limitations of such a task. It also resonates with antitheodicists who claim theodicy is a failed theoretical enterprise complicit in, or culpable of, defending the existence of some evil that should only be descried and combated. In 'justifying' certain evil, a theodicist is said to aid and abet an evil's existence or desecrate the morale and integrity of victims who have already suffered enough. For antitheodicists who are theists, such a practice may also impair belief in God by implying God is constrained by our moral paradigms or conceptions, thus not speaking of God rightly and justly.

While I share some of the convictions of antitheodicists and appreciate Rabbi Unsdorfer's caution above, if such a warning were ever possible to heed, it cannot be morally followed today because of our greater awareness of the horrors of Majdanek, the Khmer Rouge, or the endemic poverty and disease that crushes so many in our world. Instead, faith in God demands one seeks understanding, prays for understanding, and has the courage to place one's theological beliefs and arguments, which can never encapsulate the reality of God, at the mercy of the desolate cries from the gulags, the concentration camps, and other sites of atrocity and horrendous suffering. As noted in Chapter One, while such cries should not ultimately decide what can and cannot be said about God, one would expect such a focus and demand would further problematise the already fragile enterprise of theodicy. Moreover, because I argued in Chapter Ten that theodicy also shares similar aims with evangelising and apologetics, challenges and doubts inflicted upon theodic arguments also fester at the root of an individual's faith and so the ability to

4. "Who do you think you are, anyway, to imagine yourself so high and mighty as to want to understand the ways of the Blessed name? You are but mortal human beings, who wither as the grass, whose days are as the passing shadows. And you want to understand the ways of God? The God who lives, exists, was and will be? Who do you think you are?" Quoted in Gershon

defend or preach it. How then, can I argue such texts also support the task and possibility of a viable theodicy?

In this work I have incorporated these testimonies to purge and cleanse one's theodic arguments and language. I focused on the most extreme forms of evil that can be inflicted on individuals so that every voice is included and all types of suffering are acknowledged. I also examined mass atrocity to place all theodicies on trial and so give potential credence to positions of antitheodicy. As a theist, I was seeking to challenge my contention that theism needs a viable theodicy. If a viable theodicy fails, so it would seem, would a viable theism. I therefore tested various theodic approaches to gauge if they could still be considered viable with knowledge of such horrendous suffering or in the midst of such horror. In the course of this work, it became clear that any theodic approach that carelessly, or generally, blames the victim or implies such horrific suffering was necessary, purposive, or didactic must be considered dubious. I am not denying that some horrific suffering could be rationalised as necessary, or purposive, or didactic, but am insisting that its existence remains a scandal and horror; utter abjection. Christ's resurrection does not glorify the cold, calculated, and horrific torment present on the cross. The agony of Jesus of Nazareth, the anguish of his followers and onlookers, the complicity of individuals who orchestrated his sentence and the abuse that he suffered, are never justifiable in themselves. I thus agree with Phillips that language of justification amidst horrendous suffering is morally reprehensible. Jesus should not have had to die like he did. It is a scandal and a shame that it happened though one can take comfort in Jesus's life and convictions, which offers us a way and a path despite (not because of) the affliction that may follow.

These testimonies describe and are witness to abomination and horror. They are the nadir of the extremities humanity can inflict or must endure. Charlotte Delbo writes:

> There she is in the hollow of the ditch with her hands scratching the ground, her feet looking for support, straining to lift her heavy head. Her face is now turned towards us. Her prominent cheekbones are violet, her swollen mouth a black violet, her eye sockets filled with dark shadows. Her face reflects naked despair.[5]

As Inga Clendinnen acknowledges in her work *Reading the Holocaust*: "Those books I discuss are those which proved their value by providing me with

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Greenberg, "Between Holocaust and Redemption" [*The Impact of the Holocaust on Jewish Theology,* ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 114-5].

5. Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 26.

the system of ladders I needed to scramble out over the abyss".[6] Unfortunately, I read these testimonies with the expectation, if not the result, that I would not scramble over the abyss but sink further and further within it. What I hoped would provide the ladder, if not the exit, was a potent theodicy, or failing that, a biblical story of some meaning. Often I reflect upon the story of the Syrophoenician woman, her tenacity and courage in demanding Jesus heal her daughter.[7] It is as if to counteract the evil encountered one needs to arm one's memory with an analogous good, a complementary mechanism of salvation or liberation, while painfully cognisant that some of these witness testimonies – some of these once living people – stare out at me from a void that refuses such palliative soothing. Like Christ and his silence toward Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor", these witnesses 'listen' to a theodicist's appeals, hope, and protestations that such biblical stories can combat a sense of helplessness in the face of evil. But they, of course, can say nothing. And it is that silence, the silence of these victims, which always threatens to render any theological enterprise null and void.

As is evident in this work, many victims of horrific suffering deny the tenability of faith in God and present human beings broken, conquered, and corrupted by their perpetrators. Perhaps, worst of all, such accounts reveal individuals coerced or manipulated into committing acts of cruelty and injustice against their fellow victims or family members. Deeming such a world 'good' or 'holy' seems to mock that reality. At the same time, one must be careful giving these highly manipulated and morally-desultory scenarios (planned, enacted, and continually 'improved' upon by the perpetrators) too much emphasis as a means to judge the worth of all humanity or the value of creation. How one acts in a concentration camp, for example, is not the best indicator of one's morality or humanity. One must recognise that "there is a bottommost limit to ethical life".[8] Such is a Jobian 'test' of terror and evil. While responsibility can still be spoken of for many individuals, I prefer to speak of the responsibility of many of the perpetrators and organisers. But as Fackenheim emphasises with the "counter-testimony" of Lewinska and as Berkovits describes those who still believe, despite the utter decrepitude and hopelessness of

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6. Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

7. See the Appendix.

8. Didier Pollefeyt, "Victims of Evil or Evil of Victims?" In *Problems Unique to the Holocaust*, ed. Harry James Cargas (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 68. I agree with Pollefeyt that a failure to recognise such a limit (which will be different for each individual) is a failure to "do justice to the constitutive meaning of corporality in ethics" (68). Such corporality acknowledges that "Although the suffering victim also has a fundamental desire for fullness, goodness, and wholeness, in the given situation he may be forced to live within the narrow, closed limits of his tortured body to such an extent that giving in the form of human dignity, taking care of the others, is no longer possible" (78).

their situations, we also read how some maintain their integrity or their belief in God's presence. Some pray; some are converted; some insist God not only 'walked' with them, but 'carried' them. These are truth claims that 'collide' as I noted in the last chapter with their polar opposite tales, but their existence means one's faith, which remains immersed in mystery and grace, is not without 'evidence' and supportive testimony. Maybe such testimonies are minimised as the exceptions to the "overwhelming evidence" as Langer argues,[9] but we still have their testimonies, and they too are voices that we must heed and listen to. For some survivors, there are reasons to believe. If Grace Akallo speaks of God as a child soldier; or Harry Wu while a prisoner in the Chinese gulag; or Immaculée Ilibagiza amidst the Rwandan genocide; if one reads of the martyrdoms of a Rabbi Akiba or Karl Leisner; such testimonies (in such diverse and extreme circumstances), which do not subsume and silence the opposite stories, still offer a means to hope and argue why belief in God is viable and rational. Thus, these testimonies can support why faith in God remains a viable stance. While atheists can come to an opposite conclusion, these accounts also prevent them from claiming all victims deny God's presence in these horrors, rendering theistic belief to be groundless and counter to evidence. Atheists must also rely upon faith and interpretation.

I have stressed throughout this work that a theodic response is viable based on how it responds and incorporates the inevitable gaps, fragments, and caesuras within one's faith-stance on account of the magnitude and extent of suffering in this world. Grounds for scepticism and protest will influence and colour one's faith, but it is precisely such doubt that calls for a humble, post-Holocaust, pastoral approach. In the next section I will develop key benefits of this approach and outline features that a Christian theodicy must include for one's faith stance to be viable and rational.

III. The Criteria

To an antitheodicist, my demand that theodic arguments be scrutinised by turning to witnesses of mass atrocity would seem to prove the failure of all theodicy, though some antitheodicists would still claim to be theists. I have argued that such a stance is not meaningful or possible.[10]

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9. Lawrence Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4-5.

10. There can be no meaningful theism without theodicy, though there can be a sustained, enveloping call to recognize and heal the suffering of the other, as Levinas and others rightly argue. A theodicy is ultimately concerned with arguing why faith in God is meaningful and possible despite the evil and degradation of this world. If this possibility is deemed obscene or impossible, then one believes against all reason or sense. If one wants to worship and be in relationship with God, I do not see how "a theodicy without religion" will ultimately lead to a faith that perseveres and heals. Moreover, without belief in God redeeming and healing the

I have also argued that there can be no theodic-agnostics. The problem of evil must be addressed and an approach must be offered to develop how one can still speak of a meaningful faith despite, or because of, these horrors. I cannot envision a meaningful faith in God that claims this world and creation are not worth justifying or can never be justified, thus implying this world is malevolent or that life in this world is meaningless. To repeat: How can one worship a God who is said to create such a world for such a meaningless, or imponderable end? Hoping to find a theodicy that could prove antitheodicists wrong, I turned to key thinkers in three theodic fields whom I thought would be the most promising for my task. Individually, and as isolated groups, no one path was sufficiently successful. But if one highlights key strands within each, strands or features that often overlapped among disparate thinkers, a path opens up to develop a viable theodic position.

The following, therefore, are the criteria that any Christian theodicy must include to be viable despite mass atrocity:

1) That it should employ a pastoral approach informed by a post-Holocaust perspective.[11]
2) That it should testify to the pervasive goodness of creation and the need for a disinterested faith.
3) That it should promote a prayerful commitment to remember the victims of atrocity.

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suffering of so many in this world, the possibility for worshipping such a God is also made dubious because suffering and evil in this world raise fundamental questions about why "this world is not yet water".

Worship of God is fundamental for a relationship with God, to orient ourselves to assess our own worth properly – a value that ultimately springs from our being created by God in God's image and likeness. Such worship also demands a love and care for the other, whose being calls us to see God's image within all of us and to treat that other with dignity, respect, and love. In regards to the problem of suffering, I only see two meaningful positions in an age of trauma and genocide: secular humanism or a fractured, but still viable theodicy. And yet, in the sometimes conflicting tension between the authority of the victims and the authority of one's religious tradition, it seems one must maintain what I call below a 'flexible' continuity with the core of one's religious faith and history. One must also be aware of what John D'Arcy May in Chapter One calls the "unsettling dissymmetry" in how a religion responds to the Other in the realms of *gnosis* and *ethos* ["Catholic Fundamentalism? Some Implications of *Dominus Iesus* for Dialogue and Peacemaking" in "*Dominus Iesus": Anstößige wahrheit oder anstößige Kirsche? Dokumente, Hintergründe, Standpunkte, and Folgerungen* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2001), 131].

However, what happens if one radically alters and deconstructs traditional faith in God? Does one therefore lose all continuity with one's faith tradition, and so one's religious identity? On the one hand I am arguing that these testimonies must be given the authority to place all of one's theological doctrine, traditions, and beliefs into question. On the other hand, I am also suspicious of Christian theologies which have radically altered traditional components of theological belief, especially in regards to God's moral goodness, God's 'power' to redeem, God's mercy, God's connection with human suffering, and God's relation to this world and humanity. Without these aspects, I cannot fathom a viable faith or theodicy, but I also acknowledge that even these core elements may not withstand a sustained turning to the victims of atrocities of our world.

11. I want to thank Dr. Didier Pollefeyt, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, for reminding me to make the Post-Shoah element more explicit in my criteria (private e-mail 16/11/05).

4) That it should orient and sustain a devoted praxis.

5) That it should integrate theological protest and radical forgiveness.

A. Criterion One: Employs a Pastoral Approach Informed by a Post-Holocaust Perspective

Pastoral theology is concerned with the care of the soul, and a theodicy not similarly engaged may be a reckless and fruitless enterprise. Pastoral theology recognises the struggles and conflicts within each individual and how the same good person remains prone to sin and self-centeredness, embodying the Pauline quote "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate".[12] A theodicy must reflect upon the ideal trajectory of the human soul and the disordered desires and choices that cloud and pervert one's judgement and decisions. Such an approach invokes reason and passion, deliberation and feeling, body and soul. It strives for totality and wholeness. Here, too, there is no discernible separation of a theoretical or practical approach to theodicy. As Stephen Pope argued in Chapter Five, these approaches are intertwined and mutually support one another.

Moreover, as evinced in Chapters One and Ten, one's engagement with testimonies means one is immersed and informed by a post-Holocaust perspective that seems to challenge and undermine many traditional beliefs and hopes. In addition to utilising the classic texts and practices within one's faith tradition, what David Tracy calls a "hermeneutics of retrieval of the resources of the tradition for the present", after the Holocaust, especially, Tracy contends that theologians need to employ "a hermeneutics of suspicion upon the possible errors, illusions, and distortions that may also be present in so long, so rich, so complex, and so ambiguous a tradition as that of Catholic Christianity".[13] This first criterion, therefore, calls for the need to see things honestly and openly – reality, raw, with all its disparate pieces and contradictions. Whether one nominates the Holocaust or another historical tragedy, such systemic evils have shed substantial doubt on belief in order, progress, morality, meaning,[14] and goodness.

In her lecture on "Collective Responsibility", Hannah Arendt, for example, asserts how facile it is for systems of morals to "collapse overnight"[15] and return to

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12. Romans 7:15

13. David Tracy, "Religious Values After the Holocaust: A Catholic View", in *Jews and Christians After the Holocaust*, ed. Abraham J. Peck (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982), 87-8.

14. "...the Holocaust has become the occasion for a hermeneutical rupture – a crisis in the interpretation of meaning" [Darrell Fasching, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 22].

15. Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (Shocken: New York, 2003), 50.

their original meaning as *mores*, customs. Arendt's observation in the wake of World War II in many ways defines our contemporary era. In such a world, truth seems to be fluctuation and change, where nearly all elements are protean – vehicles for morphing and changing at will or in violation of one's convictions otherwise. Identity is mired in displaced communal and family memories, where home, job, and national identities seem lost in a globalised, diasporic context. Language, meaning, and history seem subjective, and often, predatory on the weak and defenceless. Many religions, despite their protestations and attempts otherwise, are often an accessory to these developments or are pushed further and further to the margins, to inhabit a self-contained world within a specific sphere. In this globalised, pluralised world, one is also confronted with competing religions that challenge a believer to maintain why one's religion is unique and true against, or perhaps, in solidarity with, other religious claims. Amidst a preponderance of doubt and choices, one knows one can be wrong; that one's Church or institution has condoned or been negligent in combating and admitting some sin within its history. One struggles, for example, to admit aspects of one's faith that cannot be compromised in inter-religious dialogue.[16] It is within this complex, conflicting, and often, paradoxical context that a theodicy has to operate. The role is made even more precarious and questionable after knowledge of such events like the Holocaust, as outlined in Chapter One. With each new, or on-going disaster or atrocity, the evidence then is continually piling up, often lopsidedly. After every disaster, a theodicist is put on the defensive, and often, succumbs to trying to defend the indefensible. It is, perhaps, because most suffering comes so unexpectedly and randomly that a theodicy also must highlight the (less-heralded) goodness of the world while also advocating a disinterested faith, as the next criterion elaborates.

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16. As noted in Chapter One and in footnote ten above (with the issue of the authority of the victims and the authority of tradition), my demand that theodicists must turn to the words of the victims of mass atrocities is a concurrent call to become open to the possibility that one's theological doctrines, tradition, and grounding will be questioned and challenged, potentially calling for change and clarification. As Thich Nhat Hanh writes in regards to interreligious dialogue: "In a true dialogue, both sides are willing to change. We have to appreciate that truth can be received from outside of – not only within – our own group. If we do not believe that, then entering into dialogue would be a waste of time" [*Living Buddha, Living Christ* (London: Rider, 1995), 9]. This is especially the case when a Christian confronts non-Christian victims of atrocity whose own faith tradition or resources have given them comfort and meaning to endure and make sense of their affliction. At the same time, it is natural to want to maintain certain convictions in regards to one's faith and to link one's religious identity with what are deemed to be key, fundamental beliefs. Needless to say, one is at an impasse in respecting the integrity (and the "face") of others, the notion that God is just and loving, and one's own faith position. McCord Adams's emphasis on the creativity and imagination of God and the divine size gap would be one place for further investigation, as would an analysis of the Church as the people of

B. Criterion Two: Testifies to the Pervasive Goodness of Creation and the Need for a Disinterested Faith

A theodicy defends the reasonableness of belief in God not simply by trying to justify the presence of evil but by elucidating how the biblical tradition that asserts God's purpose of creation is still relevant today. It thus highlights the goodness and beauty of this world and the dignity of the human person made in the image of God. It should also stress the value of a disinterested faith to attune a person to be grateful for this life but to expect suffering in this world. This criterion, therefore, promotes a language that does not denigrate God's creation nor unduly inflate the value of this world's transient goods. It accentuates a language of humility that properly assesses the value of this world in light of God's heavenly promise.

One way of accentuating this initial goodness in humanity despite the reality of sinfulness is the theory of *privatio boni*, whose continued relevance I argued for in Chapter Three while examining Didier Pollefeyt's useful reinterpretation of *privatio boni* and his additional term *perversio boni*. This theory of *privatio boni* stresses how humanity, made in the image and likeness of God, is inherently good. Such a position not only claims there are no inherently evil creatures, but that even the worst sinner is never beyond redemption in this world. It is therefore not only a foundational element of a Christian anthropodicy, but also for a Christian theodicy because it contains within it the doctrines of creation and redemption.

To only depict a random world of violence and meaninglessness, or focus only on 'wretched' humanity, is to paint an incomplete picture of our world. Sobrino aptly encapsulates this idea with his term "primordial holiness".[17] Where many only see exploitation and misery, he points to life and hope. To deny such a position is to empower suffering and evil as normative and ignore the ubiquity of profound (or 'commonplace' acts of goodness and tenderness, along with a world that glitters with order and, at times, magisterial beauty. Because our world remains in need of healing, though, a disinterested faith stance is also essential.

A disinterested faith has been one of the main strands advocated in figures as diverse as Phillips, John Paul II, and Gutiérrez, although they all do not mean the same thing and the latter two's belief in an afterlife means the term needs to be further qualified. As I argued in the previous chapter, faith in God (and the possibility for a viable theodicy) is only reasonable with the hope that the mercy and justice of God will heal and redeem in the afterlife. Without such a possibility, and

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God as described in *Lumen Gentium* to gauge how the words of a suffering, afflicted people could impact Church doctrine. I intend to treat this issue systematically in the future.

17. Jon Sobrino, *Where is God? Earthquake, Terrorism, Barbarity, and Hope*, trans. Margaret Wilde (New York: Orbis, 2004), 73.

because life for too many here has been one of horrendous suffering and affliction, theodicy and theism would both falter. Such a position is cogently summarised by Bernard of Clairvaux: "God is not loved without a reward, although he should be loved without regard for one".[18]

A disinterested faith does not mean one is passive or apathetic to one's struggles or the injustice committed against another. It does not desacralise one's life nor does it imply that we are not meant to flourish. One must believe God is concerned about our well-being but must not recklessly blame God when conditions are harrowing. In fact, it is from belief in the goodness of God's creation and the concurrent cognisance of the horror and suffering of this world that further strengthens the need for a disinterested faith. We are called to avoid attachment to the transient goods (honour, riches, and so on) of this world and not to expect to be given such excessive riches here because of our faith in God. Concurrently, we cannot accept conditions that are dehumanising and degrading for ourselves and one another. It is a disinterested service in trying to live out the will of God but it does not tolerate human-enacted conditions that cause injustice and suffering, as the call for protest (Criterion Five) and praxis (Criterion Four) make clear.

Such a self-giving call is lucid in the gospels: for the sake of Christ and to establish God's kingdom in our midst, one may encounter additional suffering and persecution. Just as a lack of celebrating the beauty of creation sullies God's intentions for this world, so, too, for a Christian, must one's following of Christ be realistic about suffering in this world to prevent unjust accusation and judging of God. While acknowledging the haphazard dispersion of good and evil makes it more cumbersome to argue for a God of love and justice, it can also provide a realistic moral framework through which to live and survive with one's religious faith intact. To ignore such a stance could render one's theodic language impotent and detached from the lived reality of so many.

A Christian theodicy without a need for faith has not and will never exist. They need each other to survive. Their survival is also embedded within the role of one's memory – in recalling the life, death, and resurrection of Christ and the promises of eternal life. However, the same process of theological memory focuses on Christ's message of repentance and calls for a commitment to heal the sufferings of others. This dual commitment necessarily leads to a mnemonic and ethical clash. Such is the focus of my next criterion.

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18. Bernard of Clairvaux, "On Loving God", in *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: The Modern Library, 2006), 434.

C. Criterion Three: Promotes a Prayerful Commitment to Remember the Victims of Atrocity

1. Commitment to Remember

As argued throughout this work, a theodicy must address the need for a religious conversion and commitment to support further the grounds for justifying faith in God amidst evil. In Christian terms, it must open a theological space for the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire individuals to work towards the reign of God on earth, thus making belief in a theodicy more reasonable and viable. In the context of articulating a faith practice that subverts "the existing forms of political life", Johann-Baptist Metz, for example, writes:

> Christian faith declared itself as the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi.* At the midpoint of this faith is a specific *memoria passionis*... [which] articulates itself as a memory that makes one free to suffer from the suffering of others, and to respect the prophetic witness of others' suffering, even though the negative view of suffering in our 'progressive society makes it seem as something increasingly intolerant and even repugnant.[19]

Making a commitment to remember victims of suffering and atrocity is one potential way to develop and sustain such a conversion or purification of one's faith. While some will doubt there is any obligation to remember, I would contend that such theological memory is a commitment grafted unto the skin and sinews of the Abrahamic faiths. Despite the need for clarification regarding some problematic biblical passages,[20] I would claim that biblical stories are composed in part to address and accommodate the role that remembering and forgetting constitute for a people's religious identity. Jonathan Sacks, for example, quotes from Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi: "Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people... Memory [is] crucial to its faith and ultimately to its very existence".[21]

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19. Johann-Baptist Metz, "Future in the Memory of Suffering", in Johann-Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and* Modernity, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (Nijmegen: The Councilium Foundation, 1995), 10-1.

20. The call to blot out Amalek (Ex. 17:14) is also an example of a biblical passage that one remembers now with a different light, namely by critiquing what is often considered "cultural genocide" that is advocated by the biblical God. Again, such mnemonic conflicts are inevitable, as discussed in the previous chapter. For an explanation of cultural genocide, see Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 13.

21. Jonathan Sacks, "The Holocaust in Jewish Theology", in *Wrestling With God: Jewish Theological Responses During and After the Holocaust*, eds. Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 663. Illustrating these points,

For Christians, Christ's message at the 'Last Supper' – "Do this in remembrance of me" – becomes a liturgical, sacramental, and moral memory-act that is often deemed the heart of that faith. For Metz, such a *memoria passionis* calls

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one can see that sometimes in the Bible there is the calling to remember to forget: "Write this down in a document as something to be remembered, and recite it in the ears of Joshua. I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens". Such admonitions to recall past events are often made from God to men to be a guide towards present and future actions: "Fear not, my people! Remember, Israel, You were sold to the nations not for your destruction" (Baruch 4:5). In the Decalogue, the Israelites are reminded that it is God "who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2) and they are "to Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8); of the Shema, devout Jews are to "take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Memories or the use of mnemonic devices are also devised by God for both humanity and God, as seen when God tells Noah the rainbow will help God "remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures" (Genesis 9:16). Memories are also pacts between human beings as the call to remember is often linked with worship of God, and failure to remember often leads to idolatry and sin. Throughout the book of Judges, the Israelites lapse into forgetting and not knowing God, resulting in their captivity to various enemies of Israel: "The Israelites did what was offensive to the Lord; they ignored the Lord their God and worshipped the Baalim and the Asheroth. The Lord became incensed at Israel and surrendered them to King Cushan-rishathaim"(Judges 3:7-8). A similar trend, of course, continues in the Prophetic books: "Truly you have forgotten the God who saves you / And have not remembered the Rock who shelters you", as Isaiah warns (17:10). The need to remember (as analysed in Chapter Eight) is also employed to sooth an angry God: "Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them, 'I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven'" (Exodus 32:13), just as the call to remember is inextricably bound with salvation (in remembering to follow and pass on God's laws in the Pentateuch). In addition, memory is joined with thanksgiving: "When my life was ebbing away, I called the Lord to mind" (Jonah 2:8), and elsewhere, "He was mindful of His steadfast love and faithfulness toward the house of Israel" (Luke 1:54; Psalm 98:3); as much as it is linked with despair: "Oh, that you would hide me in Sheol, Conceal me until Your anger passes, Set me a fixed time to attend to me" (Job 14:13). Often forgetting themselves, the Israelites wanted to make sure God was not like them: "O Lord, be mindful of Your compassion and Your faithfulness" (Psalms 25:6), and "Be mindful of me, O Lord, when You favor Your people" (Psalm 106:4).

Sadly, in the testimonies of mass atrocity, we find this call to remember entwined with utter distress and misery, which also has its place in some biblical passages: "Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; Behold and see our disgrace" (Lamentations 5:1), or "Then Peter remembered the words that Jesus had said to him, 'Before the cock crows three times you will deny me three times.' He broke down and wept" (Mk 14:72). Yet, in that agony memory is often bound up with the individual recalling God's goodness: "But then I remembered the mercies of the Lord, his kindness through ages past" (Sirach 51:8), and to the call to discipleship: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). These memories are often recapitulations, memories within memories, like Stephen's speech before he dies in Acts or reminders of what occurred in previous books as we read in Deuteronomy 6:21, for example. In 2 Samuel 11:18, Joab tells the messenger if David responds: "Why did you come so close to the city to attack it? Didn't you know they would shoot from the wall? Who struck down Abimelech, son of Jerubbesheth?", the story alludes to events in the book of Judges, and the narrator presupposes the listener or reader remembers such a story. Memories – like the almighty God manifested in a gentle breeze – can be received and passed down in many forms, perhaps given in a genealogy table, the word 'Ruth' conjuring up images of faithfulness, loyalty, and courage, in addition to her Moabite ancestry. Lastly, stories and tropes are built upon previous stories and rhetorical devices as Robert Alter has shown with his analysis of repetition and biblical type-scenes (See particularly "Biblical Type-Scenes and the Uses of Convention" and "The Techniques of Repetition", in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981], 47-62 and 88-113).

us to develop a "language of Holy Saturday".[22] In this world we are amidst and after the throes of the suffering and death of the cross but still awaiting (with anxiety and anticipation) the final resurrection of the dead. In the theodic response I am trying to develop, a response that remains characterised (but not solely defined) by its fragmentary and fractured state, such a memory and image is particularly pertinent, as troubling as it is hopeful. Christian theodic language today should resonate with the language of Holy Saturday. A key question for me is whether such a commitment to remember in forming a theodicy – integrating such memories within one's faith tradition, rituals, prayer, and liturgies – can also be a means to ensure one combats new or on-going evils.

To aid in this combating, remembering victims of horrendous suffering points to how our identities are entangled with the lot of those forsaken. Writing in the context of the civil rights movement in the United States, James Baldwin cogently remarks: "Our dehumanization of the Negro then is indivisible from our dehumanization of ourselves: the loss of our own identity is the price we pay for the annulment of his".[23] So, too, here with the victims of trauma and atrocity. Manipulating or isolating their ordeals to protect one's own (naïve) faith will only dehumanise one's beliefs and positions.

Theological memory, therefore, can heal but it also wounds and complicates one's sense of self, one's history, and one's beliefs. Despite these risks, we must still remember rightly and truthfully, for otherwise one may misuse certain memories for selfish or immoral ends or exaggerate certain wrongs that were committed.[24] In being guided by a commitment for justice, truth, and mercy, theological memory also calls an individual to cross the societal divides of class, ethnicity, religion, race, and other identity markers. Thus, we must strive to overcome denial and face those truths which challenge the stability and 'orthodoxy' of our beliefs, identity, and history. To quote Baldwin again: "[W]hat the memory repudiates controls the human being. What one does not remember dictates who one loves or fails to love…what one does not remember contains the only hope, danger, trap, inexorability of love – only love can help you recognize what you do not

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22. For a useful analysis of Metz's *memoria passionis,* see Britta Frede-Wenger, "'Good' Friday After Auschwitz?", *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust*, eds. David Patterson and John K. Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 137-49.

23. James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (London: Penguin, 1995), 30.

24. Miroslav Volf writes: "Those who recognize the moral obligation to reconcile have, as a result, an additional reason for remembering truthfully, above and beyond the fact that truthful remembering is an indispensable precondition of reconciliation between parties estranged by the transgression of one against the other. For peace can be honest and lasting only if it rests on the foundation of truth and justice" [*The End of Memory* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 56].

remember".[25]

Overcoming denial is an act of love. It admits the possibility that a damaging truth may be recovered through remembering, yet courageously perseveres. What we 'choose' to forget or not remember could be the difference of life or death, if not of our own lives than of others whom we are also responsible for in some way.[26] Overcoming denial should be the mantra that encapsulates much of our religious practice and our engagement in a deeper, more critical assessment of our familial, religious, cultural, and national histories; in short, all the multiple strands that make up our identities. Such a commitment not only may reveal difficult truths but also may unearth past connections and similarities between groups previously thought to be 'eternal' enemies. It may empower actions which heal our broken world and so reinforce the viability of a theodicy. Theologically, such a commitment to remember is to look unflinchingly at the victims of horrific crimes or at one's own prejudice, inaction, miseries, and major setbacks – and still seek the strength, faith, and courage to sing the praises of God. In this way one is also forced to confront any lingering elements of one's hesitancy to confront honestly and embrace fully the "other", who, ironically, forms parts of one's identity by being labelled enemy, infidel, or heretic.

2. Are We Responsible if We Forget? Overcoming Denial

In this embrace of the other, is Baldwin right in claiming that we are responsible for what we remember or forget? Cees Nooteboom, for example, quips in *Rituals*, "Memory is like a dog that lies down where it pleases".[27] As anyone can attest, even with the best intentions, our commitment to remember can easily falter amidst the humdrum or hectic pace of our daily lives.

Aware of how memory can be capricious and knowing the dangers that forgetting or remembering erroneously can inflict, I (like many others) want to locate a means to nurture a theological memory that can orient a person to do what is good and just. To sidestep such an admittedly complex task is to ignore a fundamental absence in many theoretical theodicies: how to minimise unjust, human-wrought, suffering. Hannah Arendt, seeking a similar goal, evaluated the educative merits of Socrates' 2-in-1[28] and Kant's categorical imperative.[29] Others

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25. James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), xiv.

26. John Donne's poem "For Whom the Bell Tolls" poignantly portrays our interconnectedness.

27. Douwe Draaisma, *Why Life Speeds Up as You Get Older. How Memory Shapes Our Past*, trans. Arnold and Erica Pomerans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

28. According to Arendt, Socrates' statement in the *Gorgias*: "it is better for me to be at odds with the whole world than, being one, to be at odds with myself" [*Responsibility and*

may look to Rawls's difference principle[30] or place one's hope in the power and beauty of literature, as Julia Kristeva does in *Powers of Horror*[31] and as Amos Oz advocates on account of literature's ability to make the reader encounter 'the other'.[32] I agree with Oz but there also needs to be a sound moral and theological value system to guide our reading to identify how and why we imagine the other. To try to empathise and understand the other is imperative, but without the means to judge whom I should emulate is another matter entirely. To repeat: the goal here is to develop a way to inculcate in all of us the capacity to be less susceptible to commit the acts that not only cause so much harm but also denigrate the meaning and value of this world, and so the possibility for a viable theodicy. Such a task can only be hinted at here, but one path could be particularly fruitful.

3. Prayerful Commitment

John Roth has written: "If prayer is to be recognized as prayer..., it is not desirable to separate prayer from either questions of theodicy or questions about theodicy".[33] In this work, I have argued that a commitment to remember the stories of victims of mass atrocity and horrendous suffering is a means of purification or self-examination. Here I want to argue that a theodicy must emphasise the value of

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Judgment, 157] emphasises the belief that if an individual is deciding to commit any act, whether it is something heinous like murder or kind like giving charity to the poor, he becomes a two-in-one when alone in thought. Through dialogue with the self, such a person has to live with the consequences of the act and what that entails, thus conversing with a murderer in the one case or a 'generous' person in the other. This awareness according to Arendt is "the ultimate criterion for Socratic morality" (Arendt 123).

29. While describing the basis of his categorical imperative and the kingdom of ends in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Immanuel Kant, writes: "Reason therefore relates every maxim of the will as legislating universal laws to every other action towards oneself; it does so not on account of any other practical motive or future advantage, but rather for the idea of the dignity of a rational being who obeys no law except what he at the same time enacts himself" [trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hacket, 1983), 40 (434)]. Kant stresses our role as rational beings, where our "dignity of humanity consists just in its capacity to legislate human law, though with the condition of humanity being at the same time itself, subject to the very same legislation" (44 [440]).

30. In a *Theory of Justice*, Rawls states that the difference principle seeks to ensure that everyone's expectation becomes raised to a reasonable level and becomes accessible to those least advantaged. The difference principle linked with the principle of equality – that all people are inherently equal and should be treated as ends and never solely as means – must be a stating point and reflection for all laws in a just society [Revised Edition (Belknap Press: Cambridge, 1999)].

31. Julia Kristeva writes: "only literature: the sublime point at which the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us – 'and that cancels our existence'" [*Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press), 210].

32. Amos Oz writes: "I believe imagining the other is a powerful antidote to fanaticism and hatred. I believe that books that make us imagine the other, may turn us more immune to the ploys of the devil, including the inner devil, the Mephisto of the heart. . . Imagining the other is not only an aesthetic tool. It is, in my view, also a major moral imperative" ["The Devil's Progress". *Guardian. Review*. September 3, 2005: 4-5].

33. John K. Roth, "In Response to Leonard Grob and Juergen Manemann", in *Fire in the Ashes: God, Evil, and the Holocaust,* 270.

incorporating such a commitment within one's prayer (or spiritual) life. This will not only help purify and challenge one's theological and theodic language but support the praxis emphasised in Criterion Four. It is to look at the potential muck and sin of one's own life before blaming and castigating others, or even, God. While prayer, as the previous chapter showed, needs further theoretical and systematic analysis in light of mass atrocity, it remains that space and nexus to bridge some of the gap between God and ourselves. As Mark O'Keefe, O.S.B., writes: "God's self-giving love, which is the model and foundation of all loving, seeks reciprocity, mutuality, return. Our prayer is precisely our response. On our part, then, every act of prayer is an act of giving ourselves in return, surrendering to the one who first gave himself to us".[34] In conjunction with my other criteria and in light of the definition of prayer above and the one given in the previous chapter, it is the practice I promote as the best means to develop and sustain moral renewal and conversion. In particular, this spiritual practice may be especially helpful for those who have so far been protected from radical evil. While it is easy to reduce these horrific accounts to a historical anomaly, the knock on the door, as Solzhenitsyn writes, always comes unexpectedly.

The key is how one reads these texts so that one's prayer can be a genuine means to reach a state of solidarity with such victims. Thus, memory – through the language of prayer – can be the conduit for a person to engage the burden of past (and present) injustice and encounter it at one's deepest, most intimate level, whether in those private moments when an individual is alone in meditation or prayer or when participating with a community through a liturgical, sacramental, meditative, or other praxic-act. Such a theological practice works on various levels, recalling God's promises and the stories of saints and believers healed while also remembering the tales of the broken, forsaken, and despondent. Such memories and the contemplation of such memories are meant to fuel and guide one's thoughts and attitudes towards performing good actions.[35] It is, thus, an integral means to honour the lives of such victims and to examine one's own actions and thoughts by allowing the sacredness of one's prayer life to trespass on the more sacred ground of the

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34. Mark O'Keefe, O.S.B., "Prayer and Conversion" in *The Tradition of Catholic Prayer*, eds. Christian Raab, O.S.B., and Harry Hagan, O.S.B. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007), 268.

35. Origen also notes the value of remembering God and one's obligations to God: "Those who give themselves continually to prayer know by experience that through this frequent practice they avoid innumerable sins and are led to perform many good deeds. For if the remembrance and the recollection of some illustrious man confirmed in wisdom induces us to emulate him and often restrains our impulses towards what is evil, how much more does the remembrance of God, the Father of all, and prayer to him befit those who are convinced that they are present with and speaking to God who is there and listens to them" [*The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism,* ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 83].

stories of victims of atrocity.

Further comprehensive analysis is needed here, but let me offer a few further points and some salient questions. First, I agree with Avishai Margalit's remark that "it is hard to carry the memory of isolated and unconnected events and people, taken from very different histories",[36] not to mention the impossibility of remembering the sheer number of such events.[37] Secondly, if one tries to incorporate these images within one's prayer life there is also the danger of turning them into a fetish instead of seeking an encounter with such lives as sacred and bearing responsibility. Thirdly, there is the possibility to be so overwhelmed that one simply becomes numb to such horrific accounts.[38] Fourthly, when one reads explicit testimonies of suffering as depicted in a work like Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*,[39] how can one even begin allowing such worlds to be transfixed in memory, to slither into the sacred life and language of one's private prayers?[40] Fifthly, if one agrees that such a commitment to remember the victims is obligatory, does one then choose the specific memories or try to remember as many as one can? Lastly, does such a need cease if such exposure fuels an awareness that seems to make one less likely to commit such a wrong, or in theodic terms, ensures the necessary humility, hesitation, and reflection needed before asserting a theodic argument?

It seems this practice is part of such a tenuous, ongoing project, with the gaps of memory so prominent, with the 'heat of the moment' so falsely palliative, that for such an injunction to bear any weight, it must be sustained like the old refrain "to pray ceaselessly". I would contend, especially for those Christian believers who have been fortunate to escape horrific suffering, that as a part of our prayer practice, we should read the Bible or a meditative reflection alongside an account of mass atrocity, as a means to listen to those who endured such struggles and to think and

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36. Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 80.

37. Ibid., 32.

38. Always lurking is the risk of over-exposure, which can lead to our accepting these realities as quasi-normative. Iris Chang, in *The Rape of Nanking,* quotes war correspondent John Gillepsie: "I think I have said enough of these horrible cases – there are hundreds of thousands of them. Seeing so many of them finally makes the mind dulled so that you cease to be shocked anymore" [(New York: Penguin, 1997), 155].

39. We read, for example, how "Chinese witnesses saw Japanese soldiers rape girls under ten years of age in the streets and then slash them in half by the sword. In some cases, the Japanese sliced open the vaginas of preteen girls in order to ravish them more effectively" [Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking* (New York: Penguin, 1997), 91]. This is another work that is a good fit to my discussion in Chapter One on the problems of memory and truth in regards to trauma. Chang's tragic death and the questioning of her sources by some critics can be added to the discussion contained there.

40. Eva Hoffman writes in *After Such Knowledge*: *Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*: "the injunction 'to remember' repeated frequently and hypnotically enough can become precisely a summons not to make the effort of thought, not to consider what we are remembering or how difficult such a feat really is" [(New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 176].

pray on the matter to come to understanding and judgement to aid one's actions. Such a practice will be jarring and challenging and so should only be followed periodically, and ideally, in the context of a supportive community.[41]

Contemplating such stories is not without precedent in Christian tradition with its long spiritual tradition of meditating upon Christ's wounds or reflecting on the lives of the saints, many of whom were martyred. Catholics, for example, partake in the Stations of the Cross and pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, which call on the believer to contemplate the scourging at the pillar or the crowning of thorns. Ignatian spirituality also entails believers imagining themselves in the various scenes of Christ's passion. There is then, not only a rich spiritual practice to build upon, but also a way to connect the life of Christ with these victims. The difference is that some of these stories will offer no hope or reason to maintain one's theological and theodic positions. However, just as contemplating Christ's passion is a means to spur the believer to good words and deeds, so, too, can the contemplation of these testimonies provide the same impetus for good actions while purging (and reinforcing) one's theodic language.

D. Criterion Four: Orients and Sustains a Devoted Praxis

Spurred in part by prayer, one's committed, moral praxis is not only the key response to evil, but is also an essential piece of any theodicy which aims to theorise about – and help to sustain –the beauty and goodness of the world. By praxis, I mean a synthesis of our thoughts, intentions, deliberations, statements, judgements, and actions. As Kenneth Surin writes: "To regard theodicy as a purely theoretical and scholarly exercise is to provide – albeit unwittingly – a tacit sanction of the myriad evils that exist on this planet".[42] In addition, in the journey to make sense of some evil and suffering, praxis in the form of serving others may also be the best means to rediscover the goodness of life and to be reminded of the countless selfless people in the world who quietly go about their lives committing acts of kindness and love. It is also a calling to remove any barriers that keep individuals marginalised. As Didier Pollefeyt writes: "the basic structure of ethics after Auschwitz should be openness to the vulnerability of the other".[43] Any moral or ethical system must acknowledge the fragility and vulnerability of the human condition, acknowledge one's own sins and

41. Working with a pastoral advisor here would be advisable. There are times in one's life when reading such accounts is not recommended, depending on one's emotional and spiritual state and the conditions and afflictions of one's life.

42. Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1986), 50.

the failures of one's religious and civic institutions, and strive to reach out with compassion and mercy to the most vulnerable and ostracised. Such a commitment will also be shared by many antitheodicists and so is another means to close the gap between theodicists and antitheodicists. Again, Sobrino reminds us that to find God, we need to find humanity; and through service to one another – especially towards the most defenceless – humanity can often be found. Sobrino writes: "…by walking 'with God' in history, more can come out of that history. The poor can remain committed to life, they can maintain their hope, and keep on walking".[44] Through such a praxis, one may encounter that deep, loving presence of God that had seemed remote, hidden – *Deus Absconditus.* It is difficult to disavow all goodness in the world when you know people who strive to make this world better. Once you leave yourself open to seeing this goodness, a space develops for the grace of God to be felt (again). The hope of promoting such a space, as my final criterion argues, is in part why all theodicies must also integrate theological protest and radical forgiveness.

E. Criterion Five: Integrates Theological Protest and Radical Forgiveness

Both of these features have been dealt with in previous chapters, so here I want to show how to integrate forgiveness and protest. In simple terms, protest and forgiveness purify each other. Forgiveness without protest may be seen as "cheap forgiveness", a failure to confront the evil and suffering within one's midst. In forgiveness, one forgives the person who has committed the atrocity but rails against the offence committed, decries it, and clamours for such acts never to be repeated. Thus, forgiveness both heals and loves – and condemns and curses. Protest without forgiveness may become embittered and weighed down by a sense of privilege and entitlement. Protest must have a means of closure and healing or it will eventually consume all in its path. Forgiveness rightly focuses and directs one's legitimate anger and resentment toward an injustice. Thus, they are intertwined and are essential to stress in forming a viable theodic position.

For example, in one of the most noteworthy psalms of affliction in the Bible, we read: "But I am a worm, less than human; / scorned by men, despised by people …[Yet] You drew me from the womb; / made me secure at my mother's breast. / I became your charge at birth; / from my mother's breast, you have been my God"

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43. Didier Pollefeyt, "The Kafkaesque World of the Holocaust", in *Ethics After the Holocaust: Perspectives: Critiques, and Responses*, ed. John Roth (St. Paul: Paragon House, 1999), 239.

44. Jon Sobrino, "Reflections Before Aparecida" in *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008), 97.

(Psalm 22: 7; 10-1). In prayer, meditating on Christ's life and suffering – and the many disciples who walked and walk a similar path – along with a commitment to remember and meditate upon this world's innocent victims, may help guide one through those inevitable dark nights. Within this struggle is also where theological protest can be such an invaluable aid. As argued in Chapter Eight, protest can be a prayer to purge ourselves of misconceptions about God and our adherence to false and potentially damaging expectations. It thus opens the way for a disinterested (or other-centred) faith. Recall, for example, Jesus's cry on the cross before he died and his quoting of Psalm 22 (which, as seen above, is ultimately a poignant prayer of trust in God amidst horrible suffering). In essence, one blends together and inhabits the same theological space of "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46) and "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).[45]

Advocating protest is also a crucial point in common between theodicy and antitheodicy. Antitheodicists argue that no justification for the ills of this world is possible. They protest the magnitude of the injustice. For them, no reasons can ever explain such suffering. But a theodicist should also protest. And within such protest and because of one's dialogue and commitment to remember the suffering of so many others, one knows there are limits, walls, barriers to one's proclamations and the need for tact, nuance, and measured language.[46]

Hopefully, such protest can be enriching, which is why one ideally is being nourished in one's prayer life and guided by a tradition in dialogue with a community. If one protests in isolation, then such a practice could be all-consuming, inhibiting one's relationship with God. Ideally, protest should promote positive, moral action – the desire to seek and implement change – which is why memory, protest, and praxis are so intertwined and are elemental to most Jewish thinkers and liberation theologians. The practice of radical forgiveness is one way to bring these three strands together.

While forgiveness does not curtail judgment, it means one judges with love and mercy, never in retaliation or vindictiveness. Is, however, everyone called to forgive, and is forgiveness always a means of healing for the victims? Lawrence Langer, for

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45. In Luke, one can also read: "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do" (23:33). While not Jesus's last words and ones that are not in the oldest papyrus manuscripts of Luke, they are nevertheless the most important words on the cross and ones that should have guided a Christian's theological relationship with the Jewish people, especially in challenging views that erroneously blame Christ's death on "the Jews".

46. Rabbi Marc Ellis, while praising liberation theology, also rebukes some liberation theologians for not recognising how "theological reflections of the Jewish community after the Holocaust do not resonate with triumphal language in the theological realm". See his *Towards a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 73; and also Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok's *As it is in Heaven: Jews, Christians, and Liberation Theology* (New York: Orbis, 1987).

example, writes: "I have never encountered a single Holocaust testimony supporting the conclusion that compassion for those guilty of mass murder is 'deeply therapeutic and restorative'".[47] Such a claim needs continued analysis, especially in light of Christian tradition, but as noted in the previous chapter, meaningful forgiveness entails both the forgiver and the forgiven freely coming together in an unthreatening and stable environment. In a Holocaust context, this is often impossible because many of the victims have been murdered. Moreover, for satisfactory forgiveness to occur with the possibility for reconciliation, the perpetrator must also acknowledge the need for repentance.

As Nigel Biggar writes, only this admittance enables "...the moment of absolution – the 'I forgive you, and will henceforth treat you as if you had done me no wrong!' This part, which completes the process of reconciliation, must withhold itself until repentance is demonstrated, because otherwise the wrongdoer will learn nothing, and the injury he has done to one, he will now proceed to do to others".[48] While the observation of Langer is important, and as noted in the previous chapter, is certainly supported by Wiesel's prayer for God never to forgive the perpetrators of the Holocaust, I remain unconvinced that the possibility of forgiveness between those still living can be permanently closed without detrimental effects to the victim. Such pain and bitterness, while understandable, would only seem to threaten, if not actually succeed in, consuming such a victim's outlook and worldview. Perhaps forgiveness is not the only way to avoid this state and one can accept the reality and devastating loss of atrocities and still make a commitment not to let it pervade and haunt the rest of one's life. My stance as an outsider to such evils no doubt renders these remarks dubious, but keeping open the possibility for forgiveness (under the proper conditions Biggar sets out) would seem to place one in a better position to cope and live with such trauma and loss.

Because I have argued that even in the post-mortem state there remains the possibility for a perpetrator to refuse the need for repentance, reconciliation may never be complete in every instance, but the desire to forgive can still become a means to aid in the victim's process of healing. It would (likely) entail admitting one's own faults and the need for healing and the openness and courage to be ready to forgive one's self, other human beings, and God, even if the latter is ultimately

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47. Lawrence L. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 91. He is quoting from Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003).

48. Nigel Biggar, "Epilogue – "Burying the Past After September 11", in *Burying the Past – Making Peace and Doing Justice After Civil Conflict*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 328-9.

not to blame. Such forgiveness, which must be all-embracing, and so radical, is also linked with disinterested faith. For in such a disinterested state, one is already imbued with the gift of forgiveness, not expecting to live a life here free of any suffering or affliction.

Regardless of how divine justice is enacted, candid protest should lead to rectifying some problem or preventing its reoccurrence on earth. We can see this position in many testimonies of mass atrocity. They write so that the world will know. After his escape from the gulags of North Korea, Kang Chol-Hwan testifies: "I was worried that Japanese or Korean papers might write about my case. What then would happen to my family? I tried to take comfort in the fact that whatever damage there might be was probably already done. There was no turning back. And I'd won on at least two counts: I was safe and sound, and I would be able to tell the world about life in the North Korean camps".[49] Such a protest can fuel praxis because one is spurred to act on account of one's anger at injustice. Forgiveness opens a space for that same praxis, a space for healing, reconciliation, and renewal.

IV. Conclusion

These criteria are meant to reinforce each other and to curtail any excesses that could be detrimental to one's faith stance. Thus, for example, a disinterested faith balances a calling for theological protest, while a calling to promote and highlight the goodness of our world is constantly challenged and checked by the ongoing commitment to see this world with the sense of fragmentation and scepticism of a post-Holocaust perspective. These criteria are also intended to serve as a means to develop a viable theodic position and to be used to critique other theodicies and antitheodicies. In the spirit of this work, however, these criteria remain open to further revisions or additions, but it is hoped that many of these features, having been well-tested over time, will continue to have relevance to one's moral and spiritual needs.

Mass atrocity and horrendous suffering assault the credibility of a theodicy and so one's theological beliefs. However, as argued throughout this work, a theodicy that acknowledges its failures and limitations – and so one's ultimate dependence on faith and the grace given by God – is in a better position to persevere amidst valid reasons to doubt and cry out. Such a stance is also better aligned to develop a meaningful response to articulate why a fractured, but still viable faith is not only plausible, but necessary for there to be enduring meaning in the world and for the

49. Kang Chol-Hwan, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years in the North Korean Gulag*, trans. Yair Reiner (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 218.

hope of redemption to be fully realised. These criteria are a means to begin to formulate and develop such a position.

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In the Conclusion to this work, I will outline why my approach to theodicy has been fruitful and why it has helped to advance how we perceive and articulate the viability of one's faith despite the existence of mass atrocity and horrific suffering.

Conclusion

Salvaging Life Amidst the Rubble

> She was bitten all over, that compañera. She had no ears. All of them were missing part of the tongue or had their tongues split apart.[1]

I. Introduction

The horrific testimony above from Rigoberta Menchu's autobiography speaks of torture of the body, of tongue and ears that would have made the acts of speech and listening impaired, if not impossible. These victims, however, were also later burned alive. While theodicists must be cautious of speaking for such victims, they must assess how such survivor testimonies impact a theodicy's intentions and purported values.

This attempt at seeking a viable theodic position has sought to graft such stories within one's theological memory and theodic arguments. It has sought to listen to and reflect upon the stories of these victims of horrific suffering and carefully to consider how their words and experiences bear upon one's theodic language and arguments. Often, as many questions as 'answers' were raised, which should be expected with such a task and method. As Darrell Fasching writes: "It is doubt and questioning that always lures me on to broader horizons and deeper insights through an openness to the infinite that leaves me *contentedly discontent*".[2] With Fasching and Wiesel, I agree with the value and necessity of questions and the need to acknowledge the fragments and gaps in many of our answers. Nevertheless, seeking to articulate 'answers' is still important as such a process, even if it raises deeper and more fundamental questions, is an essential step to move closer towards the aims and positions one ultimately seeks to reach.

Nietzsche has written: "*Original* – Not that one is the first to see something new, but that one sees *as new* what is old, long familiar, seen and overlooked by everybody, is what distinguishes truly original minds".[3] With humility, I want to contend below that I have provided an approach and methodology to the problem of evil that can be considered novel and worthwhile. Through this approach I incorporated distinctive features that have raised crucial questions and answers for theodicy and helped develop important insights and criteria when attempting to

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1. Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, trans. Ann Wright, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray (London:Verso, 1996), 178.

2. Darrell J. Fasching, *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima: Apocalypse or Utopia?* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 7.

formulate or evaluate a theodic response.

II. Distinctive Features

A. Comprehensive Use of Testimonies of Mass Atrocity

My most important contribution in this work is to argue why theodicies must be judged in light of testimonies of mass atrocity and why theodicists (and consequently much theological reflection and scholarship) must work closely with testimonies of mass atrocity and accounts of horrendous suffering. It is not enough for a theodic account to add a few quotations from a Wiesel or devote a short section to such reflections. Witness testimony should be a constant presence throughout the theodic work as one seeks to refine, be challenged, and test one's theological thoughts. Such a practice ensures that the concerns, fears, and observations of such witness-voices are not stifled and reduced to an anomaly. Divergent testimonies will result in a discordant 'message', but they also present a comprehensive gamut of interpretations of such horrific events and simultaneously provide both reason to believe and reason to doubt. While one must come to live with the consequent gaps and fragments, I have argued that one's belief in God is made more credible because of this honest, all-encompassing approach. Because one is exposed to various "counter-testimonies" to these horrors, this approach also provides credible grounds for viable faith.

A theodicy that undermines or ignores such witness testimonies is in danger of providing an inaccurate and incomplete interpretation of the reality of this world for billions of people. At the same time, a position that denies any credibility for a theodicy (and again, I have argued that there can be no viable theism without theodicy) is to surrender too easily to the architects of evil and hatred. It is to let their spectres haunt untold acts of goodness, sacrifice, and courage that can permeate one's daily life, and even "flame out, like shining from shook foil" under conditions of utter dehumanisation and inhumanity.

B. Interdisciplinary Approach

In this work of theodicy I have distinctively brought together current literary and cultural studies' interpretations of these testimonies with a theological and theodic background and viewpoint. The dominant strand emphasised here is a multidisciplinary, interreligious, and multi-methodological approach rooted in

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3. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Appendix: Seventy-five Aphorisms from Five Volumes", in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1989), 200.

Christian (Catholic) tradition and the Bible. I have incorporated philosophical, literary, historical, and psychological sources and a wide-range of fields within theology, especially moral, biblical, pastoral, and systematic theology. For a theodicy to be meaningful, it must examine the complexity of this world and belief in God from as many vantage points as possible. While interfaith works of theodicy are available, less so is a collaborative effort among philosophers, theologians, legal experts, the working poor, literary critics, biologists, psychologists, sociologists, historians, astrophysicists, witnesses (or perpetrators) of mass atrocity, and so on. While such collaboration will not solve the conflicts, abrasions, absences, and gaps that pervade any theodicy, it would be a means to develop a more complete picture of the beauty, suffering, and mystery of our world.

C. Features of Theodicy and Antitheodicy

Also noteworthy here is the selection of texts of theodicy and antitheodicy with an aim to highlight the most persuasive and elemental features of both positions. Throughout I have maintained that theists must share an antitheodicist's scepticism of theodicy, but still must strive to develop a viable theodic response and so refute antitheodicists' claims that theodicy is immoral by justifying the unjustifiable, (unwittingly) colludes with some perpetrators of evil by sanctioning evil's legitimacy, or falls prey to blaming the victim who has suffered enough. Antitheodicists rightly acknowledge the extent and reality of evil in this world and where theological and biblical language seem to fall drastically short. They also rightly posit the moral danger that can result if one carelessly employs theodic language. As I have noted, their calling for protest and praxis are also essential responses to incorporate within any theodic attempt. Thus, this work has accentuated the affinities shared by these contentious views and has shown why each group benefits from engaging with and incorporating many ideas of both positions.

D. My Chosen Theodic Fields

My approach is also distinctive for its use of theodic (and antitheodic) texts from Christian philosophical theodicy, Catholic Latin American liberation theology, and post-Holocaust Jewish theology, fields which contain some of the most profound ideas, challenges, and arguments for a Christian to forge credible theodic language and practice despite mass atrocity. Such an approach seems compatible with what John D'Arcy May calls: "Covenant Christologies" that encompass "Theological reflection on the Holocaust of European Jews in the *Shoah*, often in close dialogue with Jewish religious thinkers, and the theological ferment in what has been called

the 'Third Church' of the world outside the West".[4] Such an approach, according to May, emphasises God's on-going covenant with "*all* the suffering and *all* the poor"[5] and

> offers a way of taking up the Christian struggle with violence and justice throughout the history in continuity with the numberless victims who, in the eyes of those who share this hope, find their exemplar in Jesus' own martyrdom. His death on the cross can now be understood, not so much as the definitive sacrifice which 'pays the price' for human redemption… but as God's own solidarity with the suffering of the entire creation.[6]

While my own approach is also concerned with maintaining what I would call 'flexible' continuity with the core of one's religious faith and history, I also agree with May that reflection on the lines above point to new challenges or a different way of looking at past and present theological, doctrinal, and moral dilemmas. While May also rightly notes the tensions that result when maintaining the "concept of covenant" in a pluralist or interreligious setting[7] (a tension that is raised repeatedly in this work through my analysis of non-Christian memoirs in the context of some Christian theodic responses), the inclusiveness of such a focus remains an important context to argue why one's theological hope and beliefs seek to avoid alienating or ignoring anyone while still struggling to convey why such a supposedly inclusive aim is still applicable to those who reject it or express no need for it.

As the fields I examine are too rich to address all the benefits each can offer to a Christian theodicist, I will note a few salient reasons why they are useful below.

1. Christian Philosophical Theodicy

The conceptions and resources within philosophical theodicy need to be employed if a theodicy hopes to be rational, reasonable, and relevant to one's life, hopes, and experiences. While the complaints of a Surin[8] or Philips against philosophical theodicy's "aloofness" to concrete evil has some credence, philosophical theodicy remains a limited, but valuable means to articulate the problem of evil. It not only helps to clarify pertinent questions but points to whether certain theodic claims are

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4. John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence: The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian, and Primal Traditions* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 140.

5. Ibid., 140.

6. Ibid., 140.

7. Ibid., 140. Metz's description of a political theology – "any theology that tries to reflect on Christian traditions in the context of world problems is also a 'political theology'" – could also apply to my approach ["Future in the Memory of Suffering", in Johann-Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and* Modernity, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (Nijmegen: The Councilium Foundation, 1995), 5].

8. David Brown, "The Problem of Pain", in *The Religion of the Incarnation: Anglican Essays in Commemoration of Lux Mundi* (Bristol: Bristol Classic Press, 1989), 50.

plausible, moral, or defensible. As Claudia Card writes in regards to key questions in the study of evil: "Philosophy alone cannot answer [them]. But the empirical inquiries necessary to answer them can benefit from philosophy in gaining greater clarity about what counts as evil, what the phenomena are that we should explain".[9] Moreover, abstract thinking, often criticised in the context of theodicy,[10] offers a means momentarily to distance oneself from the visceral issue one is confronting and provide a space to occupy without necessarily getting one's desires and identity mired in the specific, concrete problem. In a related sense, God's appearance to Job, which accentuated the cosmological aspect of creation, or Krishna's explanations to Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgita* provide helpful illustrations. Such an orientation and position could provide a different way of analysing a problem.

Moreover, a trenchant, theoretical argument can support and guide one's position so it can be articulated and understood for a more effective praxis while providing compelling reasons to justify one's beliefs in God despite atrocity. Such a theodic focus is particularly useful when incorporating praxic-insights from Catholic Latin American liberation theology.

2. Catholic Latin American Liberation Theology

Liberation theology's explicit focus on the poor and oppressed is a fundamental element for any theodicy, which often seems to ignore or isolate the voices of the marginalised (hence, this work's focus on testimonies of mass atrocity). Through liberation theology's core terminology and its emphasis on praxis, any theodicy that seeks to justify this world and God, must also work towards defeating and minimising that evil which is claimed to prove that God does not exist or that all theodicies are doomed to fail. The emphasis on a practical response to evil by many liberation theologians is thus linked with the focus on theoretical responses in many philosophical theodicies. Again, both approaches reinforce the aims of the other. Demarcating them is not helpful.

I also noted liberation theology's untiring effort to teach and sustain the dignity of all and its effort to abolish manmade moral, social, and economic structures that perpetuate and exacerbate unjust inequality. While the cooption of liberation theology tenets by parties or institutions antithetical to its mission has been

9. Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of* Evil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

10. John Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest", in *Live Options in Theodicy,* ed. Stephen T. Davis (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 2.

common,[11] it is difficult to find a movement that seeks to live this Christological faith so concretely and pastorally in a world often hostile to Christianity and the dignity of the human person. As noted in Chapter Ten, such praxis is even recognised by atheists like Partnoy who cannot follow her friends' faith but has more respect for their commitment to justice and peace. Again, a theodicy cannot limit itself to trying to argue why belief in a loving God is possible despite suffering and evil because such an approach is insufficient amidst genocide and mass atrocity. A theodicist must also locate, accentuate, and nurture acts of kindness, compassion, and courage through highlighting the beauty, complexity, and diversity of our world and why that reflects positively on belief in God. It must preoccupy itself with why there is so much banal, selfless, and extraordinary good in this world as much as it must immerse itself in the destruction, misery, and horrific violations that scar and demean so many.

3. Post-Holocaust Jewish Theology

Because the most provocative and enlightening Jewish post-Holocaust thought simultaneously tries to be faithful to a religious tradition of a loving, personal God involved in the life of the Jewish people and never to forget the cataclysmic catastrophe of the Holocaust, its language is constantly teetering on an abyss and yet remaining potent and firm in its convictions and theological vivacity and hope. Like liberation theology's focus on the voiceless and downtrodden, the Holocaust seems to hang over every word of a contemporary Jewish theologian and so coerces a language that is compelling and faithful; honest, yet reflective. At its most effective, it is a language of loving, theological service and protest. It is an outpouring of a persevering faith and commitment to the values and worldview that God was said to grant and promise, even if the expected role God is supposed to play has been brought into question at various times in its history, and perhaps, most acutely, as Laytner and Braiterman argue, in our contemporary times.[12]

It is my contention that no viable Christian theodicy can avoid grappling with some of its key figures and prominent ideas. The same types of questions Jewish theologians raise, especially in light of the Holocaust, are intrinsic and dominant in a Christian context, as noted in Chapter Nine with Rubenstein's challenge of biblical faith and covenants; Greenberg's "working principle"; Fackenheim's 614th commandment and his search for acts of *Tikkun Olam* (healing/mending the world);

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11. See Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 1-17. For my book review of this work, see *The International Journal of Public Theology* (Volume 1 (2007): 133-4.

12. See Chapters 8 and 9, respectively.

the "wounded" faith of Wiesel; Berkovits's attempt to respect the victims who lost their faith in God and the victims who maintain their belief; and the role of theological protest and questioning amidst traditional faith. I addressed their individual weaknesses in Chapter Nine, but all these interpretations and aspects provide essential components and challenges that a Christian theodicist must face and be in dialogue with. Obviously, the greatest difference in these accounts and a Christian theodicy is the role envisaged to Christ. However, careful and respectful probing on this issue, as exemplified by Greenberg and Fackenheim, can help Christians to clarify and articulate better their faith-position and the fact and necessity for Jesus's life and mission to help formulate one's theodic position.[13]

E. The Five Criteria

My five criteria are a concise, yet comprehensive key to approaching the problem of evil in search of a credible theodic position in an age of genocide and mass atrocity. While I am not the first to offer guidelines for a theodicy, the breadth and depth of the sources I have investigated have enabled my criteria to show how a theodicy benefits from integrating and responding to some of the main tenets of antitheodicists while including diverse voices that range from an orthodox Catholic response to suffering to the cries and arguments of witnesses to atrocity, along with some of the most powerful and applicable theological and philosophical responses within post-Holocaust Jewish theology, liberation theology, and Christian philosophical theodicy. Because of this depth and diversity, these criteria can also serve as a particularly useful guide to assess other theodicies.

III. Conclusion: *A* Fractured, but Viable Faith

Is only a fragmentary *Tikkun* possible as Emil Fackenheim writes? The examination of radical evil inundates one's religious faith with a sense of abrasion, erasure, gaps, and conflict. It seems to desiccate all theodic arguments and so the vitality of one's religious belief. While yearning to speak of hope and goodness, the theodic position I advocate, like Metz's *memoria passionis*, entails a commitment to try to remain in the presence of young Benja dunked violently in the well; with Esther and her baby on their death-march to the crematoria; with Little Eleanora in the gulags; with the anonymous boy of Plaszow forced to eat his own diarrhea; with Partnoy's husband, amidst torture, trying to think of singing "*El sapito*" to his daughter; with the young

13. See also Didier Pollefeyt, ed., *Jews and Christians: Rivals or Partners for the Kingdom of God? In Search of An Alternative for the Theology of Substitution* (Louvain: Peeters, 1997) and Beatrice Bruteau, ed., *Jesus Through Jewish Eyes* (New York: Orbis, 2003).

anonymous girl raped in Sudan; and the woman in the ditch, scratching the ground at Auschwitz – so many victims; too many, perhaps as a poet might say, for even God to remember. These testimonies never dispel all darkness and doubt. They call for a theodic language that is humble, flexible, and honest. They ensure that the threat of despair shadows one's theological hope.

For those of us who have been fortunately shielded from radical evil, it has been my contention that avoiding, concealing, or rationalising such injustices and evils points to an anaemic faith position and misrepresents the truth claims which one's religious faith advocates. Such denial or avoidance thus inevitably distorts one's identity and integrity. On the other hand, a faith-position that admits its contradictions, weaknesses, and limitations (and when linked with a Church or religious institution – its historical 'sins') takes a crucial step towards forming a viable theodic position. Such theodic language, however, inevitably incorporates a sense of fissure, discontinuity, mystery, and brokenness.

Thus, viable theodic language knowingly lacks complete certitude and is marked in some fashion by failure, uncertainty, and questioning. To borrow again Metz's term: for a Christian, a theodic language should be a "holy Saturday language". It is fractured and in need of healing. It awaits resurrection, as hope in the mercy and justice of God in the afterlife becomes essential. In the meantime, formed by one's religious tradition and community of faith and engaged in dialogue with multiple discourses, disciplines, and religions, such theodic language can nevertheless illumine or point to a position and belief that seems viable and reasonable. This is in part because it strives to maintain an open and reflective position that acknowledges its potential to be confused, opaque, or simply, wrong while aiming to reflect critically on how and why one's positions can be maintained and argued for. This tendency keeps such a position from becoming static and ossified. It maintains that a *Tikkun* can be 'whole' and 'complete' even if such 'wholeness' involves an acceptance of loss and fragments.

With a fractured faith that must struggle and thrive amidst life's swelter, confusion, and desperation, a theodicist must work within this world's fragile, fragmentary space, and ultimately must trust in – or be open to – the God he or she wants to justify, and ultimately, love and serve. Navigating such dual, divergent aims necessarily leads to gaps and fragmentary assertions, also necessitating the requirement to incorporate or acknowledge grace and hope, two of the bedrocks of one's faith, which steer one's theodicy as much as one's theodicy steers one's faith. Theodic positions, therefore, remain fragile and fractured, but still keep open a horizon for connection, solidarity, and intimacy with God.

The Incarnation, enfolding the life of Christ as a fellow sufferer and journeyer in this world, gives believers, especially victims of atrocity and horrific loss, an empathetic God who can reach out in love, solidarity, and tenderness, with the prerequisite divine qualities to heal and redeem. Those of us with a Christian faith, in the midst of such overbearing darkness, may turn to the story of that Canaanite, that Syrophoenician woman[14] with the possessed daughter who was eventually healed, and so remain adamant that if Jesus did not heal such victims in this life, he will surely heal them in the next.

Of course, countless lives – as numerable as the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore – hang upon that word "surely" – as does faith, as do countless theodicies and antitheodicies. In the end, such a fractured, but still viable faith clings to the hope that those children massacred and abused in our world today – and all the victims of unjust suffering – will finally encounter the loving God who has promised so much, and they will be satisfied, will be healed, will finally, finally be at peace. It is this hope that may be all we have – the only position, after sifting among the rubble, which ultimately seems viable – the only one we can live and die with in any meaningful sense.

14. See the Appendix.

APPENDIX

ABSENCE AND ANONYMITY: MARK 7:24-31

> And they did not kill simply. When we were weak, they saved bullets and killed us with bamboo spears. They cut Achilles tendons and necks, but not completely, and then they left the victims to spend a long time crying until they died. Cats and dogs were there, just eating people.[1]

In this appendix I want to examine and meditate upon the story of the Syrophoenician woman from the gospels. This is not a story of mass atrocity; in fact, it is a story of healing. But my purpose here is not only to show the validity of integrating and weaving accounts of scripture throughout a theodicy, but to seek for some clue, some potential meaning in a biblical story that is dominated as much by what is absent and unsaid than in any presence or uttered words. In short, we have a traumatized individual who desperately seeks out Jesus to heal her dying daughter, but who must struggle and persevere in not only advocating for her legitimate request but to be seen and viewed as a relational identity, a person and voice that deserves to be heeded and healed. As such, this story bears upon many of the themes examined in this work.

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In an often-told story from the Gospel of Mark, a woman follows Jesus into a house in the district of Tyre.[2] Thronged by desperate people of all conditions, clamouring to be healed, for their pleas listened to, calling for the cures of their ailments, for the destruction of the Romans – and no doubt various quotidian matters – the people in Jesus's time, as now, thought they found an answer – if not to evil in general – than to their own particular suffering. Along with depictions of these desperate and scarred individuals, the gospel writer makes it very clear early on in the narrative that Jesus is a hunted man. Pharisees and Herodians secretly whisper and plot. Jesus's fate is prefigured in that bloodied head on a platter. John the Baptist

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1. Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform you that Tomorrow We Will be Killed With Our Families: Stories From Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux,1988), 31.

2. According to Ched Myers this "represent[s] the northernmost geographical penetration of Mark's narrative" [*Binding the Strong Man* (New York: Orbis 1990).

proclaimed 'repentance'. He is no longer. Jesus proclaims 'repentance'. The expected ending should not be a surprise. But as with all journeys and stories, even a hero or Messiah needs his respites. Hence, Jesus's various efforts to sneak off and pray alone, or in this case, trying to enter a house unseen.

Evil and suffering, though, are often unrelenting as Jesus knew quite well – "the poor you will always have with you".[3] Children born with deformities, women suffering from hemorrhages, the blind, the deaf, victims of earthquakes, of famine and poverty, of possession by devils and evil spirits, of that ubiquitous phrase, man's inhumanity to man – were all quite evident and in ample force in Jesus's time. Such conditions were also exacerbated with war hovering over the people's past, present, and certainly, immediate future as Jew will fight Jew with the Roman army – spear and lance at the ready – waiting in striking distance. It was an era (similar to ours), rife with exploitation of the poor, of women, of the lame, of the occupied. The desperation for healing was a cacophony of prayers and groans. It was no wonder Jesus sought some distraction, some moment to hear himself breathe, some moment to think or pray or rest undisturbed.

Though Jesus walks into this house alone, a woman follows him. Like so many suffering, she is never given a name. It goes without saying that such an act in such a time was a brazen one, risky to both a woman's reputation and safety. In fact according to Ched Myers, "Unlike the approach of Jairus, her solicitation is an affront to the honor status of Jesus; no woman, and especially a Gentile, unknown and unrelated to this Jew, would have dared invade his privacy at home to seek a favor".[4] One can only imagine, if for an instant, the look on Jesus's face as he hears the woman's footsteps, the sound of her breathing, the rustling of her clothes; when he looks into those pleading eyes. Worse than one's own suffering is the ailment and malfeasance inflicted on one's child and to live and witness this suffering and be impotent to do anything. This witness and bearing of suffering was no doubt etched and inscribed on the woman's face, her gestures and mannerisms, laced within any words or sounds she sought to utter.

The Markan narrator gives us two pieces of information about this nameless woman: her daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, and perhaps as importantly, she is not an Israelite, but a foreigner, a "Greek, a Syrophoenician by

3. Mk 14:7.
4. Myers, 203.

birth".[5] The astute Jewish listener or reader of the first century would have first been aghast at the woman's action, then felt pity for her plight, and then brought back to that state of confusion, if not, indifference at the mentioning of her origin. Mark is clear: she is a pagan.[6] Interestingly, in Matthew's Gospel, the woman is called a Canaanite and this information is given immediately, while Mark delays disclosure of her ethnicity and tribal affiliation for a few verses into the story (she is simply a woman first). In Mark it is a tender if pitiful scene as she "begs" Jesus to "drive the demon out of her daughter".[7] Nameless, she is also voiceless as the narrator speaks for her, paraphrasing whatever she had actually said which has since been lost.[8] (In practical terms, because there are no other witnesses – they are alone – it is a constraint of the narrative. We will soon see why Matthew does not have this problem).

So she is a woman, alone without the support of any man, the mother of a child possessed, a foreigner, and if Myers is correct and there is usually an economic and social relation to the manifestations of physical suffering,[9] she and her daughter are marginalised in every way. In the table fellowship of the first century, a daughter possessed by a demon is marked with impurity. Her mother, who comes into daily contact with the child, would also be impure. This lack of fellowship is cited between Jews; foreigners are another story. Again, interestingly, there is a double absence in the text: layers of suffering and voicelessness like stratigraphy in a landscape. Where and who is the daughter, who is neither named nor given an age nor voice and is not with her mother? Where is she? Who is taking care of her? How did the woman find Jesus? How did she know he was coming to her district and town? Was this part of her plan from the moment she had risen that day? Moreover

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5. Mk 7:26.
6. Myers, 203.
7. Mk 25-6.
8. For an imaginary take on a similar biblical character, who is named, but is silent in the text, see Anita Diamont's *The Red Tent.* The opening of the novel is particularly fitting as the narrator is supposed to be Dinah, the daughter of Jacob who (according to traditional Biblical interpretation) is raped and then kidnapped: "We have been so lost to each other for so long. / My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust. / This is not your fault or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men who had no way of knowing. That is why I became a footnote, my story a brief detour between the well known history of my father, Jacob, and the celebrated chronicle of Joseph, my brother".
9. Jairus's daughter "is at the point of death" (Mk 5:23), but is not possessed by a demon. The healing of a Gentile also occurs in Matthew 8:5 and Luke 7:1-10, the Healing of a Centurion Servant, which also resembles this scene. The servant though "is lying at home, paralyzed, suffering dreadfully" (MT 8:6 - Luke also has him as "ill and about to die") but not possessed by a demon. In John 4:46, a royal official comes to Jesus in Cana and asks him to heal his son "who

if not Jesus, who passed this story on to others to became part of the gospel?[10] These of course are all questions outside of the text. What is striking is the woman's vulnerability, her desperation, her begging, her portrayed voicelessness. When evil and suffering strike, human beings are often reduced to such a state.

In Matthew's gospel, though, the Canaanite woman,[11] not only speaks, she shouts: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David, my daughter is tormented by a demon".[12] The change in the tone of voice along with hearing her actual words (though no doubt filtered through the mediation of a narrator) stands in stark contrast to Mark's version. Here the victim of suffering is able to find the words to articulate her suffering (something as we have seen, that is not often possible or only after many attempts). Imagine the ridicule this woman must have endured, the looks of shame that followed her, the belief that she must have done something to deserve such a fate and such a daughter. There are further differences, though; differences that will give us a model into the voice of the suffering and other people's responses, a voice that resonates within many testimonies of mass atrocity. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says nothing after the woman speaks. What must have been her reaction, her thoughts at this man's apparent dismissal of her? It would have crushed many of us.

In Mark's Gospel, he at least addresses her while refusing her request: "Let the children be fed first".[13] Moreover, as Bas M.F. van Iersal points out in *Mark: A Reader-response Commentary*, Jesus's reply here is doubly surprising "after the two preceding episodes in which he so clearly distances himself from"[14] what I would call the patriarchal and racialist prejudices inherent in his society. In Matthew there is a further tension: the disciples. Jesus is not alone in this version; he is backed by his followers. In Mark's gospel the scene is gendered in a one-to-one ratio between

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was near death". Sickness would also be a stigma but possession by demon worse.

10. Leonard Swidler argues that such stories make a strong case for the role of women in passing on (and writing down) gospel tradition and stories. See his *Jesus Was a Feminist: What the Gospels Reveal About His Revolutionary Perspective* (Lanham: Sheed & Ward, 2007).

11. In *The Vision of Matthew, Christ, Church, and Morality in the First Gospel,* John P. Meier suggests Matthew may be emphasizing here the Hebrew Bible's opposition "between Israel, the people of God and the sinful Canaanites" [(New York: Crossroad, 1991), 105]. Edward Schweizer also adds Matthew's expansion of Markan geography here to include Tyre and Sidon and a further link to the Hebrew Bible. See his *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (London: John Knox Press, 1975) 330.

12. Mt 15:22

13. Mk 7:26

14. See M.F. van Bas Iersal, *Mark: A Reader Response Commentary*, trans. W.H. Bisscheroux. Sheffield (Academic Press: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* - Supplement Series 164, 1998), 249.

Jesus and the woman, though the scene is still deemed a disproportionate one in patriarchal society. Here she is completely outnumbered: "And his disciples came and urged him, saying 'Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us'".[15]

So we are given a few pieces to fill in. This woman did not simply follow Jesus from a distance and then secretly slip into the house; she has been haranguing and pleading with the disciples. Annoyed at her or their own helplessness to cure, the disciples are eager to send her away, as if playing a role similar to Job's wife.[16] Such a reaction to the evil and suffering of others is ubiquitous, which is why the testimonies encountered in this work are so problematic when matched with one's faith: in sight of manifest evil and armed only with a provincial, exclusivist theology, it is inevitable that one seeks to urge that person – or that text – away. The voices of the suffering though do not go away, regardless of attempts to rationalise or explain them. Others may seek to silence these suffering (and no doubt grating) voices – exemplified in the story of the blind Bartimaeus when the crowd tries to quiet his pleas of "Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me".[17] The disciples perform a similar role here, a role Jesus at first seems to approve of, further aggravating the woman's plight.

He says: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel".[18] He uses a similar metaphorical connotation, using the same tenor (Israel) but with a different vehicle (sheep)[19] as he says in Mark: "Let the children be fed first".[20] The synecdoche of children to stand for Israel is made more explicit in Matthew though there is a difference in the language of the metaphor chosen as Matthew employs sheep and implies Jesus as shepherd while Mark continues the use of Bread and one loaf metaphors as the story takes place between both version of the miracle of the loaves and fishes.[21]

In addition, Matthew's Jesus is even more abrupt than Mark's – especially if

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15. Mt 15:23

16. Her role in tempting Job to be unfaithful and - "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9) - is similar to the disciples' here.

17. Mk 10:47

18. Mt 15:24

19. IA Richards: vehicle and tenor – the tenor is the literal object that is being compared and the vehicle is the object that results from this comparison. In the first example, the tenor is the Israelite people who are compared to sheep (the vehicle) – implying the feebleness and helplessness of the animal that get transferred to the Israelites; the other metaphor works the same way but with a different vehicle: children, though implying similar helplessness and dependence on a more powerful Other.

20. Mk 7:26

21. See Mk 6:32-44 and 8:1-10.

one links Jesus's response to the disciples' reaction as he seems to refuse helping her at all because of her status. At least in Mark there is hierarchical ordering. He'll get around to helping them but only after he helps the Israelites first. Either way, this is no consolation for this woman and her daughter who need healing now. Matthew stretches the scene by having the woman kneel before Jesus and say: "Lord, help me".[22] In some ways, this simple but effective plea may summarise the state of the individual amidst the onslaught of suffering; so, too, the individual before God. Here there is no fancy rhetoric: the voice is direct and calm (she is not shouting). Already rejected by the disciples and Jesus once,[23] she is put through rejection again. In both versions, Jesus invokes an argument of distributive justice saying problematically: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs".[24] Israelites were socially acculturated to equate the non-Israelite with a dog. The use of bestial or animal imagery in naming a foreigner or enemy is widely attested in many cultural discourses, as we have also seen with the more vitriolic and degrading instances with the Nazis calling Jews 'vermin' and Hutus referring to Tutsis as 'cockroaches'. The chasm between a so-called 'joke' and a racial slur may be wide enough for some people to contend here is merely the first type, but in this unequal power relation, when the 'joke' comes from the one deemed 'culturally superior' we must hesitate before implying this is a shared joke between equals.

In their *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh add: "the term dog is a strong insult in the Mediterranean world, since dogs were scavengers, not domestic pets".[25] They also note that the Greek word is closer to puppies which is analogous to the term children and the sick child but is still insulting as the woman is an adult. Bas M.F. van Iersel, however, argues that the exchange is playful "because of its content and the sound affinity in Greek between the words little daughter and little dog".[26] She further notes that

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22. Mt 15:25

23. It should be noted that a number of biblical commentaries turn this into a mere rhetorical game of irony – almost a joke – that the woman is aware of and 'plays' accordingly. This take prevents one from having to use the harsh – and almost – blasphemous - phrasing that implies Jesus was rude or rejects her. Since this investigation is concerned with the issue of theodicy, it is not the time to side with the easy solution at this point; maybe both can be employed; for now, I want to argue it is indispensable for our investigation to be aware of the possibility that the interpretation above is correct for it may give us greater insight into our reflection on theodicies in Part Two.

24. Mt 15:26

25. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Augsberg Press, 1992), 225.

26. Van Iersel, 249.

Jesus's metaphorical language of sitting down to dinner was of a private domestic scene where feeding a dog would not be appropriate (see footnote 23 for comment). Regardless, what follows may be the tour de force of the Gospel, in some ways as powerful a human response to suffering as the crucifixion and resurrection are a divine one, as the victim of suffering and exploitation labelled as woman and foreigner and unclean, empowers herself in the face of ridicule and patriarchy to say: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table".[27] As Ched Myers has pointed out in *Binding the Strong Man*, this is the only incident in the Gospels where Jesus is out-duelled in a debate: he can refute learned Pharisees and scribes, procurators, kings, and the wealthy, but he acquiesces to this unnamed, foreign, suffering woman.[28]

In this regard, of course, the story resonates with the woman bleeding twelve years from the hemorrhage.[29] Two curious issues remain. In Mark's gospel, Jesus responds to her by saying: "For saying this you may go. The demon has gone out of your daughter".[30] A subsequent question by a reader could be: "What if she hadn't said this? What if she had turned away after the disciples' insults, or Jesus' silence or his curt response? Would her unnamed, absent daughter go on suffering? Was this some type of game or test? In Matthew, what is implicit in Mark is made explicit. Jesus says: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done to you as you wish". In the context of the gospel as a faith journey, as the reader is given models of faith to avoid (the pre-resurrection disciples) or to emulate (this woman and Bartimeus, for example), Matthew's story ends by focusing on the woman's persistence and faith. She is the agent (or co-agent) who brings about her daughter's healing and Jesus is softened here to show empathy, humility, and kindness. In Mark's version Jesus is relegated to the background as the story ends with the news that her daughter was found lying in bed with the demon gone.[31] In Matthew, "her daughter was healed instantly".[32]

Though unsaid, the reader is amazed at the woman's belief as rendered in both

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27. Mt 15:27

28. Ched Myers, *Say to this Mountain: Mark's Story of Discipleship* (New York: Orbis, 1997), 82. In discussing the passage, Myers also adds a rabbinic saying of Jesus's time that may or may not be reflected in the text: "He who eats with an idolater is like one who eats with a dog".

29. See Mk 5:21-42.

30. Mk 7:28

31. Mk 7:30

32. Mt 15:28

stories: after this man has ignored or dismissed her, she simply goes home no doubt anticipating her daughter to be healed. She expected it. It wasn't a question of whether Jesus could save her daughter, but whether he would decide to do so.

I mention this story because contained within it are many of the agonic tensions we have encountered through analysing various theodicies juxtaposed or always keeping in mind, real lived suffering. How one does this keeping in mind can vary; many individuals are enduring physical, mental or emotional suffering as this is being read and need no reminders; others have experienced deep suffering in the past, a wound that perhaps has never completely healed; and from this suffering, to paraphrase Primo Levi, some have been drowned and some have been saved. The remaining group, more or less unscathed, in what I refer to as the insular world, knows more about suffering through other, often personally unknown lives as mediated through books, stories, film, TV, or speech. For them (and I would align myself in this group) in particular, a reminder of the lived suffering of others is often needed to ground any theological language.

Testimonies of mass atrocity, the stories of people who have seen the Gorgon's head and lived to tell about it, has been my grounding in this context. As such, this work necessarily posits multiple levels of truth and history within any daily, historical event.[33] This means that wherever there is a history, there are multiple perspectives limited by one's embedded, subjective self. This self is necessarily myopic in scope in relation to the cosmos and is acculturated by one's language, mores, and system of beliefs which never come simply from within but are shaped and processed and formulated in the context and community of others. It means that the version told above from Mark's point of view is different from that of Matthew and even more so from John and Luke who either chose not to include it or were unaware of it. It is, perhaps a different story than the one if told by the woman

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33. Taking multiple perspectives and vantage points – even contradictory ones – is in the hope of expanding one's vision or testing one's beliefs and vantage points. In a history of the European conquest of the Americas, we can be given two versions: the one from Columbus' journal: "The melody of the birds was so exquisite that one was never willing to part from the spot, and the flocks of parrots obscured the heavens" (from Medieval Sourcebook: Christopher Columbus: Extracts From Journals. Paul Halsall. www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/columbus1.html. 3/96. 21/2/05) or Las Casas' version that the Natives are enslaved, tortured, butchered and murdered: "At a conservative estimate, the despotic and diabolical behavior of the Christians, has over the last forty years, led to the unjust and totally unwarranted deaths of more than twelve million souls" [Bartolome de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Nigel Griffin (London: Penguin, 1992), 12]. Both versions cannot be true. By presenting both accounts, juxtaposed as some historians have done, the reader is inevitably presented with a differing truth claim and is forced to choose.

herself or her daughter, or the unnamed disciple who said to Jesus: "Send her away for she keeps calling out after us".[34] These versions would certainly be dissimilar to my re-interpretation as it is different from other outside interpretations.

As noted in Chapter One, acknowledging the possibility of multiple readings is a crucial hermeneutic practice, especially whenever one is engaged in the practice of reading a text and trying to formulate what one has read using one's own system of symbols and meaning to describe the words and experiences of others. Such description often involves parts of a narrative sometimes absent or untold – describing Sara's reaction to Abraham's sudden departure with Isaac in the *Akedah*, for example, or imagining the psychological scars of Isaac as he replays the scene in his mind.[35] Such a process of accounting for absence, one could argue, resides at the very heart of the question of theodicy, of speaking in a way for God (and his perceived absence or silence) to explain why there is evil in the world created by God.

This means while one searches for a universal grounding, for an Archimedean point that can be deemed objective and stable, one is nevertheless always standing on contradictory (perhaps profane), if not sacred ground. There are many reasons great thinkers have abandoned or minimised the question of theodicy, or why the many books written about theodicies are driven to show why they are not fully satisfying. Trying to prove a loving God amidst evil is an age-old practice of logical contradictions, and the need for rhetorical flourishes is only exacerbated by the proliferation of evil manifested in genocidal terror and the use and threat of nuclear weapons witnessed in our recent times. The globalisation of the media and the phenomena of the Internet further complicate the prospect, as the armchair viewer is brought face to face with the present and ongoing suffering of a child victim in the Darfur region of Sudan or witnesses on live television people engulfed in a Tsunami that ravishes anything in its path.

Here one is not only helpless in the sight of evil – but one's God seems to be as well – and the religious believer searching for answers begins to speak – begins to speak for God and about God's role – and whether in simple or highly academic and theoretical language – one is forming a theodicy. The gospel story above provides a message of self-empowerment and faith. It doesn't however, at least in any

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34. Mt 15:23

35. See, for example, Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hennay

correlative contemporary model, provide a universal response and religious explanation for evil. The disciples' reaction may, but this is another story. In this tale, the daughter's demon is defeated, but no doubt there were other children still suffering from demons or sickness or malnourishment when that daughter later rose from bed, healthy and cured. And it is not these 'saved' children but their neglected, dying brothers and sisters that has remained my focus and reference point especially as I have tried to move between a discussion of humanity and absence and a discussion of God and absence.

(London: Penguin, 1985), 44-8.

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