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EVIL, A CHALLENGE TO PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

PAUL RICOEUR*

That both philosophy and theology encounter evil as a *challenge* unlike any other, the greatest thinkers in both these disciplines are willing to admit. What is important is the way in which this challenge, or this failure, is received: do we find an invitation to think less about the problem or a provocation to think more, or to think differently about it?

What the problem of evil calls into question is a way of thinking submitted to the requirements of logical coherence, that is, one submitted to both the rule of non-contradiction and that of systematic totalization. It is this way of thinking that has prevailed in all attempts at a theodicy, in the strict sense of this term, and which however diverse they may be in their responses, all agree in defining the problem as follows. How can we affirm at the same time, without any contradiction, the following three propositions: God is all powerful; God is absolutely good; yet evil exists? Theodicies, in this sense, appear to be a battle for the sake of coherence, in response to the objection that only two of the three stated propositions are compatible, not all three at once. However, what is assumed by this way of posing the problem is never called into question, namely, the propositional form itself in which the terms of the problem are stated, along with the rule of coherence which any solution it is presupposed must satisfy.

In order to demonstrate the limited and relative character of this way of posing the problem, we need first of all to get some sense of the scope and the complexity of the problem with the help of a phenomenology of the experience of evil, secondly to traverse the levels of

*John Nuveen Professor (Emeritus) and Member of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago and Dean of the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences and Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus) at the University of Paris X (Nanterre), Dr. Ricoeur presented this paper as a Plenary Address to the 75th Anniversary Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (1984).

discourse taken by speculation on the origin and the *raison d'etre* of evil, so as to be able thirdly to reconnect the work of thinking, arising out of the enigma of evil, to other responses stemming from action and feeling.

I. Between Blame and Lament

The whole enigma of evil may be said to lie in the fact that, at least in the traditions of the West, we put under the same terms such different phenomena as sin, suffering, and death. However, evil as wrongdoing and evil as suffering belong to two heterogenous categories, that of blame and that of lament.

There is blame where a human action held to be a violation of the prevailing code of conduct is declared guilty and worthy of being punished. There is lament where some suffering is undergone. We do not make it happen, it befalls us. Being an effect, it may be related to a variety of causes—the adversity of physical nature, illness, the infirmities of body or mind, or affliction produced by the death of loved ones, the perspective of our own mortality, affronts to our dignity, and so on. Lament, therefore occurs as the opposite of blame; whereas blame make culprits of us, lament reveals us as victims.

What then invites philosophy and theology to think of evil as the common root of both sin and suffering, in spite of this undeniable polarity of blame and lament? The first motive lies in the extraordinary way in which these two phenomena are intertwined. On the one hand, punishment is a form of physical and psychical suffering, whether it involves corporal punishment, some deprivation of liberty, shame, or humiliation. This may be why we speak of guilt itself as *poena,* that is, as a "pain", a term that bridges the gap between evil committed and evil undergone. On the other hand, one principal cause of suffering is the violence human beings do to one another. In fact, to do evil is always, either directly or indirectly, to make someone else suffer. In its dialogical structure evil committed by someone finds its other half in the evil suffered by someone else. It is at this major point of intersection that the cry of lamentation is most sharp.

We are led a step further in the direction of a unique mystery of iniquity by the presentiment that sin, suffering, and death express in different ways the human condition in its deepest unity. Two indications in the experience of evil point toward this underlying unity of the human condition. On the side of moral evil, first, the experience of guilt entails, as its dark side, the feeling of having been seduced by overwhelming powers and, consequently, our feeling of belonging to a history of evil, which is always already there for everyone. This strange experience of passivity, at the very heart of evil doing, makes

us feel ourselves to be victims in the very act that makes us guilty. This same blurring of the boundaries between guilt and being a victim can also be observed if we start from the other pole. Since punishment is a form of suffering allegedly deserved, who knows whether all suffering is not in one way or another the punishment for some personal or collective fault, either known or unknown? It is this dark background of both guilt and suffering that makes evil such a unique enigma.

II. Levels of Discourse in Speculation on Evil

We may not turn toward theodicies properly speaking, subject to the rules of non-contradiction and systematic totality, without having first passed through a number of levels of discourse in which we may discern an increasing order of rationality. I will consider three stages of discourse—myth, wisdom, and gnosis—as leading to the level of rational theodicies.

1. The Stage of Myth

Myth constitutes the first major transition from experience to language in several ways. In the first place, the ambivalence of the Sacred, as described by Rudolf Otto, confers on myth the power to assume both the dark and the luminous sides of the human condition. Next, myths incorporate our fragmentary experience of evil into those great narratives of origin, as Mircea Eliade has emphasized throughout his many works on this topic. By telling how the world began, a myth tells how the human condition came about as something generally wretched and miserable. But myth's function of providing order, thanks to its cosmological import, has as its corollary—and its corrective—the profusion of explanatory schemes it has produced over time. The realm of myth, as the literature of the Ancient Near East, India, and the Far East reveals, is a vast field of experimentation, or even of playing with hypotheses in the most varied and the most fantastic forms. Within this immense laboratory, it appears as though no conceivable solution to the order of the whole cosmos, and hence to the enigma of evil, has not been essayed at some point or another. These solutions oscillate between the level of legends and folklore, close to the demonic dimension of the experience of evil, and that of metaphysical speculation, exemplified by so many Hindu and Buddist documents. The counterpart of this tremendous contribution of mythical thought to speculation on evil is that one is ceaselessly brought back to the question of origin: *From whence comes evil*? Rational theodicies will get caught up in this search for an origin, which may finally be a blind alley.

2. The Stage of Wisdom

Can myth fully answer the expectations of acting and suffering human beings? Only partially, inasmuch as it does respond to a form of questioning that is inherent in the very form of the lamentation: "How long?" "Why?" To this interrogation, however, myth brings only the consolation of order, by situating the supplicant's complaint within a more encompassing framework. But it leaves unanswered one important part of the question, which is not just "Why?" but "Why me?" Here the lament turns into an actual complaint. It demands that divinity account for itself. In the biblical realm, for example, one of the important implications of the Covenant is that it adds to the dimension of partnership that of a lawsuit or legal process. If God brings a case against his people, the same may be said about their relation to God.

With this insight, myth has to change registers. It must not only narrate the origins, in order to explain how the original human condition reached its present state, it also has to explain why such is the case for each and every one of us. This shift leads us from myth to the stage of Wisdom. Myth narrates, Wisdom agrues.

The first and most tenacious of the explanations offered by Wisdom is, of course, that of retribution. All suffering is deserved because it is the punishment for some individual or collective sin, known or unknown. This is the stance taken, for example, by the deuteronomist school of historiography and superimposed onto the great traditions of the preexilic times. That the sages should argue against this dogma is easy to forecast. As soon as there are judiciary systems that attempt to apportion pain in terms of degrees of guilt, the very notion of retribution loses its spell. The actual apportioning of misfortune can only appear as arbitrary, indiscriminate, and disproportionate. Why did this person die of cancer and not that one? Why do children die? Why is there *so much* suffering, *far beyond* ordinary mortals' capacity for suffering?

If the book of Job holds the place it does in world literature, it is first of all because it provides us with a "classic" of this argumentative mode of wisdom. It is also because of the enigmatic and perhaps even deliberately ambiguous character of its conclusion. The final theophany brings no direct answer to Job's personal suffering, and speculation is left to pursue more than one direction. The vision of a creator whose designs are unfathomable may suggest either consolation that has to be deferred until the eschaton, or that Job's complaint is displaced, even set aside, in God's eyes, as the master of good and evil, following Isaiah 45:7 ("I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am the Lord, who does all these things"), or

that perhaps the complaint itself has to go through one of the purificatory tests I shall return to in concluding in order that Job should become able to love God "for nought" in response to Satan's wager at the beginning of the tale.

For the time being, let us leave open these questions and follow further the line of speculation begun by wisdom.

3. The Stage of Gnosis and of Anti-Gnostic Gnosis

Thinking would not have moved on from wisdom to theodicy if gnosticism had not elevated speculation to the level of a gigantomachy, where the forces of good are engaged in a merciless struggle with the armies of evil, in order to bring about a final deliverance of all the particles of light held captive by the shadows of evil. From this perspective, we may say that Western thought is in debt to gnosticism, broadly conceived, for having conceived the problem of evil in terms of one all-encompassing problematic: *Unde malum*? But even more important is the inclusion of philosophical categories in the speculation on evil set forth by Augustine in his fight against the tragic vision of this gnosis. From Neo-Platonist philosophers Augustine takes the idea that evil cannot be held to be a *substance*, because to think of being is to think of something one, intelligible, and good. Hence it is philosophical thought that excludes every phantasy of evil as substantial. In return, a new idea of *nothingness* comes to light, that of the *ex nihilo* contained in the idea of a total and complete creation, and associated with it, the idea of an ontic distance between the creator and the creature, therefore of the "deficiency" pertaining to creatures as such. In virtue of this deficiency, it becomes comprehensible that creatures endowed with a free will could "turn away" from God and "toward" what has less being, toward nothingness.

This first feature of the Augustinian doctrine should be acknowledged for what it is, namely, the conjunction of ontology and theology in a new type of discourse, that of *onto-theo-logy*.

The most important corollary of this negating of the substantiality of evil is that the confession of evil grounds an exclusively moral vision of evil. If the question "*unde malum*?" loses all ontological meaning, the question that replaces it—*unde malum faciamus*? (from whence comes wrongdoing?)—shifts the problem of evil into the sphere of action, of willing, of free will. Sin introduces a distinct case here, a *nihil privativum*, entirely brought about by the fall, whether this refers to human beings or to higher creatures such as the angels. For this form of nothingness, there is no need to search for a cause anywhere other than in a bad will. Augustine's *Contra Fortunatum* draws from this moral vision of evil the conclusion that most concerns

us here, namely, that all evil is either *peccatum* or *poena*, either sin or pain considered as punishment. This purely moral vision of evil leads in turn to a penal vision of history. No soul is unjustly thrown into misfortune. Only divine grace may interrupt the curse of punishment.

The price to pay for the coherence of this doctrine is an enormous one, and its magnitude was to appear on the occasion of Augustine's anti-Pelagian quarrel. In order to make credible the idea that all suffering, however unjustly apportioned or however excessive it may be, is a retribution for sin, it was necessary to give the concept of sin a supra-individual, historical, and even generic dimension, which led to the doctrine of original sin or of a sinful nature. I shall not retrace here the stages of its constitution, which include a literal interpretation of Genesis 3 augmented by an emphasis on Romans 5:12–19, a justification for the baptism of infants, and so forth. Instead allow me to underscore the epistemological status of this dogmatic proposition about original sin. In one sense, it does take up one fundamental aspect of the experience of evil, namely, the both individual and communal sense of human impotence in the face of the demonic power of evil already there, long before any bad initiative may be assigned to some deliberate intention. However this enigma of the power of evil already there is set within the false clarity of an apparently rational explanation. By conjoining within the concept of a sinful nature the two heterogeneous notions of a biological transmission through generation and an individual imputation of guilt, the notion of original sin appears as a quasi-concept that we may assign to an anti-gnostic gnosis. The previous content of this gnosis is denied but the form of its discourse is reconstituted, that of a rationalized myth. As for suffering, which remains the leading thread in my presentation, the failure of this discourse on original sin is a double one. Besides the conceptual inconsistency just referred to, it leaves unanswered the protest of unjust suffering, by condemning it to silence in the name of a massive indictment of the whole of humanity.

4. The Stage of Theodicy

We only have the right to speak of theodicy as such (1) when the *statement* of the problem of evil rests upon propositions intended to be univocal, which is the case of the three assertions usually considered: God is all-powerful; God's goodness is infinite; evil exists. (2) When the *goal* of the argumentation is clearly apologetic: God is not responsible for evil. And (3) when the *means* used are supposed to satisfy the logic of non-contradiction and of systematic totalization. These conditions were only fulfilled within the framework of ontotheology, which joined terms borrowed from religious discourse,

principally "God," and terms stemming from metaphysics, whether Platonic or Cartesian, to cite only two examples, such as being, nothingness, first cause, finality, infinite, finite, etc. Theodicy, in this strict sense, is the brightest jewel of onto-theology.

And in this regard, Leibniz's *Theodicy* remains the prime examples of the genre. On the one hand, all the forms of evil, not just moral evil, are taken into consideration and put under the title "metaphysical evil," which is the unavoidable defect of all created being, if it is true that God cannot create another God. On the other hand, classical logic receives an enrichment through the addition to the principle of non-contradiction of the principle of sufficient reason, which is presented as the principle of the best, as soon as we agree that creation stems from a competition in the divine understanding between a multiplicity of world models of which only one includes the maximum of perfections and the minimum of defects. This notion of the best of all possible worlds, so scoffed at by Voltaire in *Candide* following the disaster of the Lisbon earthquake, cannot be understood so long as we have not grasped its rationale, that is, the calculation of the maximum and minimum, of which *our* world is the result. It is in this way that the principle of sufficient reason can fill the gap between logical possibility—that is, what is not unthinkable—and contingency—that is, what could have happened differently.

The failure of the *Theodicy* results from the fact that a finite understanding will be unable to reach the evidence for this guaranteeing calculation, only being able to gather together the few signs for the excess of perfections over imperfections in the balance of good and evil. Therefore a robust human optimism is required in order to affirm that the final sum is unequivocally positive. But since we only ever have the small change of this principle of the best, we have to content ourselves with its aesthetic corollary, in virtue of which the contrast between the negative and the positive works for the harmony of the whole. It is just this claim to establish a positive total for the weighing of good and bad on the basis of a quasi-aesthetics that fails as soon as we are confronted with misfortunes whose excesses cannot be compensated for by any known perfection. Once again it is the lament, the complaint of the suffering righteous person or people that overthrows the notion of a compensation for evil by good, just as was the case with the idea of retribution.

The sharpest, although not fatal, blow to the idea of a theodicy, however, has to be the one Kant leveled against the very basis of the onto-theological discourse upon which all theodicies are constructed, from Augustine to Leibniz. Kant's implacable dismantling of rational theology in the Dialectic of his *Critique of Pure Reason* is well known. Once deprived of its ontological support, theodicy falls under

the rubric of "transcendental illusion." This is not to say that the problem of evil disappears from the philosophical scene, however. Quite the contrary, in fact. But it now refers uniquely to the *practical* sphere, as that which ought not to be and which action must struggle against. This shift from the theoretical to the practical sphere of reason will provide us later with the needed transition to the last stage of my presentation, dealing with the connection between thought, action, and feeling.

Before reaching this last stage of our journey, however, I need to say at least a few words about a mode of thinking that claims to overcome both the shortcomings of the pre-Kantian theodicies and the Kantian critique of rational theology: the dialectical one. By a dialectical mode of thinking I mean an attempt to use negativity as the dynamic principle of a thought that would no longer be equated with knowledge, where knowledge is understood as a subject-object correlation.

I will use Hegel and Barth as two exemplary exponents of such dialectical thinking; Hegel being the paradigm of a conclusive dialectic, Barth the paradigm of an inconclusive, even a broken dialectic.

With Hegel we try to think more, with Barth to think differently.

For Hegel the dialectic is that of the Spirit that makes the difference between God and the human mind irrelevant, for Barth the dialectic deepens the gap between the wholly other and the world of creatures. For both of them, however, the "thought-work" leads to failure, yet to a productive failure, if I may dare put it this way. I mean, their thought leads to an aporia that calls for integration into a larger dialectic, that of thought, action, and feeling.

Thinking more with Hegel means following the painful but victorious "work of the negative" from the sphere of logic to that of Nature and of Spirit, and within the sphere of Spirit from the subjective, to the objective, and finally to the absolute Spirit. On every level, negativity is what constrains each figure of the Spirit to invert itself into its contrary and to engender a new figure that both surpasses and preserves the preceding one, in the twofold sense of the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*. This conclusive dialectic makes the tragic and the logical coincide at every stage. Something must die so that something greater may be born. In this sense, misfortune is everywhere, but everwhere it is surpassed, to the extent that reconciliation always wins out over what is torn apart.

The question is whether this triumphant dialectic does not reconstitute, with logical resources unavailable to Leibniz, another form of optimism issuing from the same audacity, with perhaps an even greater rational *hubris*. Indeed, what fate is reserved for the suffering of victims in a worldview where the pan-tragic is constantly covered

over by a pan-logicism? We may say that the scandal of suffering is overlooked in two ways. First, it is diluted and defused by the very expansion of negativity beyond the human predicament. Second, it is silenced by the substitution of reconciliation (of contradictions) for consolation addressed to human beings as victims. The famous motto of the "cunning of reason" in the Introduction to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* is the well known stumbling block of this post-Kantian theodicy.

The irony of the Hegelian philosophy of history lies in the fact that, assuming that it does give a meaning to the great currents of history, an assumption that is not at issue here, it does so to the extent that it abolishes the question of happiness and unhappiness. History, it is said, is not "the soil in which happiness grows."[1] But if the great actors in history are frustrated as concerns happiness by history, which makes use of them, what are we to say about its anonymous victims? For we who read Hegel after the catastrophes and the sufferings beyond number of our century, the dissociation that his philosophy of history brings about between consolation and reconciliation has become, to say the least, a source of great perplexity. The more the system flourishes, the more its victims are marginalized. The success of the system is its failure. Suffering, as what is expressed by the voices of lamentation, is what the system excludes.

Will a broken dialectic—that of Karl Barth—do better justice to the phenomenon of victimization than the victorious dialectic of Hegel? Up to a certain point, yes. But beyond it, no. Up to what point? To the point when it acknowledges its broken condition as irretrievable.

The famous section of the *Church Dogmatics* entitled "God and Nothingness"—translating the strong German [*Gott und das Nichtige*] (E.T. vol. III, Part 3, #50, pp. 289–369)—may be assigned to a "broken" theology, to the extent that it sees in evil a reality that is not commensurate with the goodness of God and of creation, and furthermore a reality that is not reducible to the negative side of human experience, which was the only one taken into account by Leibniz and Hegel. Instead we are to think of a nothingness hostile to God, not just a nothingness of deficiency and privation, but one of corruption and destruction. In this way we do justice to the protest of suffering humanity that refuses to allow itself to be included within the cycle of moral evil in terms of the doctrine of retribution, or even to allow itself to be enrolled under the banner of providence, another name for the goodness of creation. Nevertheless we may say that we

[1] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introductions: Reason in History*. Trans. by H. B. Nisbet. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 79.

"know" the reality of evil, to the extent that we confess that nothingness is what Christ has vanquished by "nilhilating" himself on the Cross, and also that God met and struggled with this nothingness in Jesus the Christ. This "christological turn" given to the problem of evil is one of the paradigmatic ways of thinking more about evil by thinking differently. I would not say that the christological turn as such constitutes a breach of the pledge no longer to return to the conciliatory mood of pre-Kantian and post-Kantian theodicies, although I would feel more comfortable with the method of correlation applied to both Christian symbols *and* human experience by Paul Tillich, Langdon Gilkey, and David Tracy. The breach, to my mind occurs when Barth relates the reality of nothingness to the "left hand of God," the one which rejects when the right hand elects: "As God is Lord on the left hand as well, He is the basis and Lord of nothingness too" (p. 351).

Can this coordination without conciliation between God's left and right hands make sense? If it is not a covert concession to the failed theodicies of the past and accordingly a weak compromise substituted for a broken dialectic, does it not reopen the way to speculations such as those of Giordano Bruno and Schelling on the demonic aspect of the deity? Paul Tillich was not afraid to take up this issue that Barth both so encouraged and so refused. But how then does thinking guard itself against the drunken excesses that Kant denounced with the term *Schwärmerei*, which includes both the sense of enthusiasm and mystical madness?

Did not wisdom already encounter this *aporetic* aspect of thinking about evil, an aporetic aspect opened up by the very effort of thinking more and differently? With this open question my second part comes to an end.

III. Thinking, Acting, and Feeling With Regard to Evil

On the level of theoretical thinking the problem of evil remains a challenge that is never completely overcome. In this sense, we may speak of a failure of pure speculation. Yet this failure has never led to a sheer capitulation of thought, but rather to untiring refinement in speculative logic, under the prodding of the question "Why?"—"Why me?"—raised by the lament of victims. Hegel's triumphant dialectic and Barth's broken one are both instructive in this regard. The initial enigma is elevated to the rank of a terminal aporia by the very work of thinking that finally fails.

It is to this aporia that action and the catharsis of feelings and emotions are called upon not to give a solution but a response, a response able to render the aporia productive.

A turn from theory to practice was already initiated by Kant, as I have said. But this turn is not a turning away from thought. Instead it is the continuation on another plane of thought's interminable work. One symptom of this may be found in the meditation on radical evil with which Kant's *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone* opens. This meditation by itself is sufficient to prove that practical reason has its own way of failing and of bordering on mystery when it comes to the question of evil. If we may think in conceptual terms of radical evil as the supreme maxim that grounds all the bad maxims of our free will the *raison d'etre* of this radical evil is inscrutable (*unerforschbar*): "there is then for us," Kant says, "no conceivable ground from which the moral evil in us could originally have come."[2] Along with Karl Jaspers, I admire this ultimate avowal on Kant's part. Like Augustine, and also perhaps like mythical thought, Kant caught sight of the demonic aspect of the ground of human freedom, yet he did so with the sobriety of a thinking always careful not to transgress the limits of knowledge.

Keeping in mind this transfer of the aporia from the sphere of theory to that of practice, we may nevertheless speak of the response of action to the challenge of evil.

For action, evil is above all what ought not to be, but what must be fought against. In this sense, action inverts the orientation of looking at the world. Myth tends to pull speculative thought back toward the origin of things. From whence comes evil, it asks. The response, not the solution, of action is to act against evil. Our vision is thus turned toward the future, by the idea of a *task* to be accomplished, which corresponds to that of an origin to be discovered.

But we should not assume that by placing the accent on the practical struggle against evil we have once again lost sight of suffering. To the contrary. All evil committed by one person, we have seen, is evil undergone by another person. To do evil is to make another person suffer. Violence, in this sense, constantly recreates the unity of moral evil and suffering. Hence, any action, whether ethical or political, that diminishes the quantity of violence exercised by some human beings over against other human beings diminishes the amount of suffering in the world. If we were to remove the suffering inflicted by people on other people, we would see what remained of suffering in the world, but to tell the truth, we have no idea of what this would be, to such an extent does human violence impregnate suffering.

But I readily concede that action alone is not enough. The

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Trans. by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 38.

arbitrary and indiscriminate way in which suffering is apportioned whether by violence or by the ultimate part of suffering which cannot be ascribed to human interaction-illness, old age, or death-keeps rekindling the old questions: not just "Why?" but "Why me?" "Why my beloved child?"

The emotional response that the practical one calls forth as its necessary complement cannot be anything other than a catharsis of the emotions that nourish the lament and that transform it into complaint. I will take as my model for this transmutation of the lament the "work of mourning," as Freud describes it in his famous essay "Mourning and Melancolia." Mourning, Freud tells us, is a step by step letting go of all the attachments, cathexses, investments, that make us feel the loss of a loved object as a loss of our very own self. This detachment that Freud calls the work of mourning makes us free again for new affective attachments or investments.

What I should like to do is to consider Wisdom, with its philosophical and theological prolongations, as a spiritual help in this work of mourning, aimed at a qualitative change in the lament and the complaint. The itinerary I will briefly describe in no way claims to be exemplary in all regards. It only represents one of the possible paths by which thought, action, and feeling may venture forth together.

The first way of making the intellectual aporia productive is to integrate the ignorance it gives rise to, the *docta ignorantia,* into the work of mourning. To the tendency of survivors to feel guilty about the death of someone they loved, as well as to the tendency of victims to blame themselves and to enter into the cruel game of the expiatory victim, we must reply: "No, God did not want that, even less did God want to punish you. I don't know why things happened as they did, chance and accident are part of the world."[3] This would be the zero degree, so to speak, in the catharsis of the complaint.

A second stage in the catharsis of the lament is to allow it to develop into a complaint against God. This is the way taken by the work of Elie Wiesel. The very relationship of the Covenant, to the extent that it is a mutual action that God and human beings bring against one another, invites us to pursue this course, even to the point of articulating a "theology of protest," such as that suggested by John K. Roth in his *Encountering Evil.*[4] What one protests against is the idea of divine "permission," which remains the expedient of every theodicy and which Barth himself tried to rethink when he distinguished between the victory already won over evil and the full

[3] In this regard, the little book by Rabbi Harold S. Kusner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), can be a useful pastoral aid in some cases.

[4] John K. Roth, *Encountering Evil* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1981).

manifestation of this victory. Our accusation against God is here the impatience of hope. It has its origin in the cry of the psalmist, "How long O Lord?"

A third stage in the catharsis of the lament is to discover that the reasons for believing in God have nothing in common with the need to explain the origin of suffering. Suffering is only a scandal for the person who understands God to be the source of everything that is good in creation, including our indignation against evil, our courage to bear it, and our feeling of sympathy toward victims. In other words, we believe in God *in spite* of evil. To believe in God *in spite of* . . . is one of the ways in which we can integrate the speculative aporia into the work of mourning.

Beyond this threshold, a few sages advance along the path that leads to a complete renouncing of any and all complaint about evil. Some even reach the point of discerning in suffering some educative and purgative value. But we should immediately add that this meaning should not become the object of a specific teaching; it can only be found or rediscovered in each specific case. And there is a legitimate pastoral concern that this meaning taken up by a victim not lead him or her back along the route of self-accusation or self-destruction.

Some people, still more advanced as regards this path of renouncing complaining, find a consolation without any parallel in the idea that God too suffers and that the Covenant, beyond its conflictual aspects, for Christians, culminates in a partnership in the suffering of Christ. But the theology of the cross, that is, the theology that holds that God died in Christ, remains meaningless without a corresponding transformation of our lament. The horizon toward which this wisdom is directed seems to me to be a renouncement of those very desires the wounding of which engenders our complaint. This is a renouncement, first of all, of the desire to be spared of all suffering. Next it is a renouncement of the infantile component of the desire for immortality, one which allows us to accept our own death as one aspect of that part of the negative that Karl Barth so carefully distinguished from aggressive nothingness, *das Nichtige*. A similar wisdom is perhaps indicated at the end of the book of Job when it is said that Job came to love God for nought, thereby making Satan lose his bet. To love God for nought is to escape completely the cycle of retribution to which the lamentation still remains captive, so long as the victim bemoans the injustice of his or her fate.

Perhaps this horizon of wisdom, at least as it appears in the West under the influence of Judaism and Christianity, overlaps the horizon of Buddhist wisdom at a significant crossing point which only a long dialog between them could make more conspicuous. . . .

However, I do not want to separate these individual experiences

of wisdom from the ethical and political struggle against evil that may bring together all people of good will. In relation to this struggle, these experiences are, like all acts of non-violent resistance, anticipations in the form of parables of a human condition where, such violence having been suppressed, the enigma of real violence will be revealed.

Translated by David Pellauer