

OR

Sin, Evil, Suffering, and the God of Love

Psalm 42: 9-11, Mt. 27: 45-46, Romans 11: 15-25a, all of Job

The “stock” Christian answer to the inevitable “Why?” question amid suffering or tragedy is “It was God’s will.” Preserves sovereignty of God alright, but what kind of sovereign God allows this?

Classical theodicy dilemma:

- God is omnipotent (all-powerful)
- God is benevolent (good)
- Sin, evil, suffering, and tragedy are real and powerful

3 traditional Christian ways of dealing with this dilemma:

- God is all-powerful but not good (Dostoevsky in *Brothers Karamazov*?)
- God is good but not all-powerful (Kushner in *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*)
- Denying the existence of evil altogether (few)

Yancey says “why” question has no answer and that “Where there is suffering, there is Messiah.”

Strictly speaking, none of the above options is open for Christianity

Some Solutions to the Theodicy Problem (reason alone can’t do it—Luther called reason “The Devi’s Whore” 2
Dangers in any theological system: 1)no reason 2)only reason (must have faith)

1. God uses evil to bring about good (Rom 8:28), Joseph sold into slavery in Genesis
2. Augustine: creation is basically good and evil is the malfunctioning or perversion of something that was created good. Evil rests in human nature’s changeability; i.e. we are given the “free will” to choose the wrong, and sometimes because of sin we do (this preserves God’s goodness but absurdity is that humans were good in creation but chose evil....but, sin IS absurd! Free-will defense still doesn’t get God off the hook. Augustine even said it’s better to have a world with as much variety as possible and that there IS no good without evil.
3. Irenaeus: We’re created with a capacity for good but we’re not yet completely there (Wesley)
He puts our destiny in the future...things take time....Luther tended toward this aspect of Irenaeus...Irenaeus said if we’re too near to God (without sin), his presence would overwhelm us. If there’s no evil, then no ambiguity, and the stage could not be set for a loving God
4. Dostoevsky: shoots down all attempts to solve problem of evil in the world by logical means. In BK, Ivan rejects ANY answer. “I don’t CARE what the answer is; it can’t justify THAT?” (even if God didn’t cause it, God didn’t stop it.) Dostoevsky says answers to questions = the most fundamental principle of human existence.

BUT: PT is with Yancey. Theodicy can’t be answered; it’s something that can only be addressed through presence. People most profoundly need presence (creation story)—the presence of the one who died or of God or of SOMEBODY! (child with nightmare)

Sometimes you might even KNOW the answers (why did my husband leave me?) but during a crisis giving the answer isn’t appropriate!

Answers are not fundamental; presence is fundamental. (Luther at end of his life—we are beggars, it is true.)