

## EVIL, SUFFERING, HOPE: THE SEARCH FOR NEW FORMS OF CONTEMPORARY THEODICY

### I. INTRODUCTION.

#### SOME PROBLEMS WITH THE MODERN FORM OF THEODICY

Modern thought, both philosophical and theological, has been relatively impoverished on the issues of suffering and evil. Most modern theodicies have ended in failure.<sup>1</sup> Surely the history informing those theodicies took a turn for the worse from the Leibnitzian puzzlements over the Lisbon earthquake to the collapse of modern theodicies and humanistic anthropodicies in the interruptive and *tremendum* impact of the Holocaust on all Western senses of modern progress. The attention of many has been turned away from modern self-confidence to face the evils and sufferings of whole peoples—the colonization of the Americas, Africa, parts of Asia and Oceania, the horrors of the Middle Passage, the famines of Ireland and Russia, the Armenian massacres, the Gulag Archipelago, Cambodia, the AIDS plague, Bosnia. On and on the list runs with relentless severity. Voltaire's *Candide* yields to Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan's protest atheism (I am tempted to say his real atheism to distinguish it from the paper-thin, unserious theories that often bear that honorable name) still challenges Alyosha's vision of a compassionate, suffering Christ empowering Christian solidarity with all suffering and Christian resistance to all evil. Indeed, since Nietzsche, Alyosha Karamazov has become, for many, the very symbol of the honest Christian: without any final explanation for evil and suffering, indeed resisting evil and aiding the suffering but finally silent in the face of the mystery of evil and God, and turning anew to study the mission, message, and fate of Jesus as the Christ in order to see again the compassion of God.<sup>2</sup>

Where was modern philosophy and theology in all this history? Somewhere else, it seems, inventing a new discipline named theodicy to work out the problems of God, evil, and suffering insofar as those problems could be

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<sup>1</sup>See, especially, the study Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) on the failure of what he names "theodicies with a theoretical emphasis." My own position, as the essay clarifies, does not hold that there can only be a "practical" position but that any new theoretical position must be explicitly related to the traditions of the suffering of peoples—and thereby demands new theological understandings of God and history.

<sup>2</sup>Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958).

adequately understood in the preferred forms of modern rationality including the forms of all intellectuals. "Intellectual," as Simone Weil observed, is perhaps an ugly word but we may deserve it.<sup>3</sup> However, even intellectuals become ill and eventually, like all others, die. The pervasive force of that necessity enters every life at the last. All thought must be interrupted by the great counterexperiences of suffering,<sup>4</sup> especially the suffering caused by the horrifying historical evils whose echoes no serious thinker can avoid. To develop a *logos* on *theos*—a theology—today is to start by facing evil and suffering. To develop a theology today is to reject modern theodicies in their modern forms of purely theoretical solutions which, however finely tuned in argument and however analytically precise in concept,<sup>5</sup> are somewhat beside the point—the point of facing with hope the horror while still speaking and acting at all by naming and thinking the God of genuine hope.

In these, as in so many important theological issues, the religious sensibilities of religious peoples—especially oppressed and marginalized peoples in their songs, their endurance and protest, their struggles for justice, their forms of prayer and lament, their liturgy, their laughter, their reading of the Scriptures—are often wiser not only religiously but also theologically than the carefully crafted theodicies of the professional theologians. Eugene Genovese has shown this with clarity in his fine study of how the antebellum slaves read the accounts of suffering, struggle, and liberation in Exodus far more accurately than the official preachers and theologians of the period did.<sup>6</sup> African-American theologians, with their recovery of the slave narratives, the folktales, the trickster figures, the spirituals and blues, continue this religious-theological heritage.<sup>7</sup> Several post-Holocaust Jewish theologians—Arthur Cohen, Emil Fackenheim,

<sup>3</sup>Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* (Boston: Beacon, 1952): "intellectuals—an awful name, but at present they scarcely deserve a better one" (71).

<sup>4</sup>See especially the several reflections of Edward Schillebeeckx here, especially in *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1980) esp. 671-718.

<sup>5</sup>The emphasis here is on the problem of modernity in the theories rather than theory itself. Recent analytical philosophy positions of such "Christian philosophies" as Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga seem, in my judgment, caught more in "modern" theory than their appeals to "premodern" resources refined through modern analytical means may suggest. Plantinga, to be sure, is very aware of the problems of modern theodicies and struggles with great acumen to avoid those difficulties with his revised "free will" defense: see especially *God, Freedom, and Evil* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974). For an alternative view, see Terence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup>Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1976).

<sup>7</sup>Inter alia, see James Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (New York: Seabury, 1972); Dwight Hopkins, *Black Theology USA and South Africa* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1989); Emile Townes, ed. *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1993).

Irving Greenberg—<sup>8</sup>have also developed new forms for theological thought—like Fackenheim's reading of Elie Wiesel's work as "mad midrash," like Greenberg's radicalized new covenant theology and Cohen's amazing rethinking of Rosenzweig. Surely a large part of the reason for Levinas's impact on Jewish and Christian thought today is his recovery of an ethics of the other as first philosophy. It is Levinas's philosophical ability, after the Holocaust, to develop an ethic of the other based on the core insight that the face of the other says "Do not kill me!" The recovery of formerly repressed and marginalized voices of women in all cultures over the centuries from the scriptural period to our own imploding contemporary Church is, of course, the clearest and strongest voice of all across all the new forms and contents invented by feminist, womanist and *mujerista* theologies.<sup>9</sup> All these new forms for theologies are grounded in a refusal to turn away from evil wherever and whenever it exists and a refusal to embrace any theodicy—indeed any theology—that ignores the suffering of any people or individual. Recall the haunting refrains of suffering and resistance, of strength, hope, and sometimes joy in the struggle in the songs and tales of oppressed peoples everywhere. Surely theologians can hear again the strength and tragedy in the songs and comic tales of the famine Irish and their descendants in the Troubles. We can recall the tragic joyous plaintive undertones of so much Latin American music and its brilliant literature of magic realism. Surely we can sense the refusal to avert one's eyes (more accurately one's soul) from the nightmare that has been the history for so many Slavic peoples. Indeed, every oppressed people has such tales to tell, such new forms to invent—and these narratives of enduring suffering and resisting evil with strength and sometimes even joy are the narratives most needed to empower and transform whatever form theodicy may yet take in our postmodern day.

But this is to get ahead of the narrative I wish to tell in this essay. Part of the ambiguous and pluralistic heritage we share as theologians is modernity and,

<sup>8</sup>Arthur Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust," in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977) 7-55.

<sup>9</sup>Inter alia, see Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon, 1983); Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Rebecca Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989); Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Maria Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1993); Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Jesus and Salvation," *CTSA Proceedings* 49 (1994) 1-18; Shawn Copeland, "Wading through Many Sorrows," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil and Suffering*, ed. Townes.

therefore, its modern forms of theoretical theodicies. Even on the strictly intellectual side something went seriously wrong with modern theodicies in both philosophy and theology. Part of the problem was (and for some philosophers and theologians still is) the belief that philosophy and theology could abstract from the concrete history of suffering surrounding them by enforcing modernity's famous separations: thought from feeling, content from form, theory from practice. And yet it is impossible—intellectually impossible and therefore theologically and philosophically impossible—to endorse these modern separations and then attempt to think clearly or systematically about the realities modern theodicies were designed to reflect upon: pain, suffering, evil, hope, love, faith, God.

As both rhetoric and hermeneutics insisted in premodern thought and now insist anew in postmodern forms after their long exile as “mere rhetoric” and “mere hermeneutics” by modern theory, thought cannot be separated from feeling nor form from content. As Pierre Hadot has shown,<sup>10</sup> the ancient philosophers did not separate practice (including practices as specific as “spiritual exercises”) from theory. Neither do contemporary Buddhist thinkers when they turn their attention to reflection on suffering and evil explicitly allied to the practices of attention and meditation informing all Buddhist theory. Modern Christian theodicies had no such hesitations: thought on suffering could be separated from the feeling and experience of suffering. Thus suffering could not function as the negative counterexperience disrupting the continuities and easy optimism of modern theory. The form of modern theory in theodicy—clear, systematic, argumentative, above all, rational—assured itself that no other form—prayer, liturgy, sacrament, song, narrative, lament, tragedy—was needed to encompass the problem of suffering or to name and think either hope or God. Nor need modern theory—even theodicy—concern itself overmuch with praxis, especially not with what spiritual exercises meant for premodern theodicies (as, for example, in Irenaeus or Augustine or Anselm or Aquinas or Hildegard or Teresa).<sup>11</sup> For them the exercises were needed both to clear the mind and prepare the spirit to embrace a vision—a *theoria* in the ancient sense—which may aid Christian theological reflection on evil, suffering, hope, and God.

Modern Western culture, I am convinced, will one day be read as deeply ambiguous—both liberating and narrowing for the spirit and the mind. Unlike any other culture of which we have knowledge and unlike Western culture itself in the premodern period and, unlike much of Western culture today in that elusive set of movements in search of a name and thereby calling itself with the

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<sup>10</sup>Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>11</sup>Contrast, e.g., John Hick and his premodern mentor Irenaeus on this issue: see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Fontana, 1968) and “An Irenaean Theodicy,” in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981).

non-name postmodernity,<sup>12</sup> modern Western culture believed that we not only could but should separate thought from feeling, content from form, theory from practice. Despite the many great accomplishments of modernity (accomplishments which—considering the alternatives of societal and ecclesial obfuscation, mystification, intolerance, and even tyranny—clearly still demand defense, including theological defense) modernity has also proved impoverishing in its inability to face evil and suffering squarely: not only personal suffering but especially the suffering modernity's own historical success often caused—the suffering of whole peoples, cultures, and groups both outside and within modern Western culture.<sup>13</sup>

## II. THE PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF FORM IN MODERN THEODICIES

The debate over modernity remains an essentially contested one.<sup>14</sup> For the moment I can only give my own reading of that modern narrative—our narrative—in the hope that this interpretation may illuminate why some of us consider most modern theodicies close to bankrupt morally, intellectually, and religiously, that is, theologically.

There are various ways to make useful distinctions among the most basic forms of religious expression. When one is attempting to highlight the reality of the participation of human beings in the cosmos and, in Jewish and Christian faith, in relationship to God, the most basic distinction is that between religion as manifestation and religion as proclamation.<sup>15</sup>

Religion as manifestation signifies the sense of radical participation of any person in the cosmos and in the divine reality. The sense of God's radical immanence in both cosmos and self is strong as, indeed, is the sense of the felt relationship of self, nature, and the divine. This sense of religion as manifestation is in sharp contrast to religion as proclamation. In the latter case (and the three great prophetic and monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all proclamation traditions at their religious heart) a sense of God's transcendent power is also a source of the divine disclosure as principally in history, not nature. Indeed, the proclamation traditions introduced a new sense

<sup>12</sup>David Tracy, *On Naming the Present* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1995).

<sup>13</sup>Lucien Richard, *What Are They Saying about the Theology of Suffering?* (New York: Paulist Pres, 1992).

<sup>14</sup>Inter alia, see Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983); Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity in Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and, especially, Louis Dupré, *The Passage to Modernity* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup>See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 193-229 for a clarification of these categories.

of distance between God and human beings and a powerful sense of an interruption of the once powerful, indeed radical sense of belonging to or radical participation in the cosmos.

Of course the sense of participation in nature does not die in prophetic traditions—as the Jewish liturgical year, the Christian sacraments, or Islamic ritual make clear. However, the prophetic traditions—with their strong sense of God's transcendence allied to the powerful prophetic sense of an ethical responsibility to resist evil and face historical suffering—have their own ways of relating to evil, suffering, and hope—including straightforwardly ethical-political ways—as we shall see in contemporary prophetic practical, not modern theoretical theodicies.

Many indigenous traditions, however—the native American traditions in all the Americas, for example—have never lost the earlier religious sense of radical participation in nature and the cosmos. Those traditions—once named “pagan” by Jews, Christian, and Muslims—have returned to haunt the conscience, the always-ethical conscience of the prophetic, proclamation-oriented tradition. In any mystical reading of the prophetic traditions—as in kaballistic traditions in the ethical monotheism of Judaism—there is also a return of the repressed other—the so-called “pagan” sense of manifestation of a felt relationship uniting self, cosmos, and God.

Indeed it is difficult to overemphasize how such a sense of what I will name a felt synthesis was for most ancients and medieval thinkers. I agree fully with Louis Dupré in his important and wise new book *A Passage to Modernity* that the most important and widely overlooked consequence of modernity (which he persuasively dates as beginning as early as the nominalist crisis of the fourteenth century and the humanist developments of the fifteenth century) is the breakup of both the ancient and the medieval senses of a synthesis of God, self, and cosmos.

Clearly all ancient and even most Jewish, Christian, and Islamic understandings of what I here call a felt synthesis<sup>16</sup> of God, cosmos, and self are principally

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<sup>16</sup>I emphasize the “felt” character of the synthesis more than Dupré does in order to highlight the integration of “feeling” and “thought,” “form and content” and practice and theory in premodern thought. The “felt” character of the premodern syntheses also highlights religion as manifestation (and thereby a felt sense of participation) in premodern thought. As Françoise Meltzer once observed to me, much “postmodern” thought (including my own) is often characterized by a form of nostalgia for premodern fragments expressing a felt unity along with a radical suspicion of all totalities. This, perhaps, also illuminates why many theologians and philosophers (like myself) now so distrust modern theodicy’s temptation to provide a total explanation while admiring premodern attempts at uniting feeling and thought, form and content and, especially, spiritual practices and theory into a persuasive (and nontotalizing—as in evil, for Augustine, so brilliantly analyzed as “privatio boni”) unifying view that differs substantially from modern philosophical (e.g., Liebnitz), or theological (e.g., modern neo-Scholastic) theodicies. On

expressions, religiously, of manifestation. The ancients may indeed have had a sense of cosmos that was central both to an understanding of the divine realm (the gods, even Zeus and Jupiter) and a sense of human beings as a *microcosmos* related to the *macrocosmos* and of human reason as *logos* intrinsically related to both the cosmic and the divine realms. The ancient syntheses—especially but not solely the neo-Platonic and the Stoic—were, one and all, felt syntheses of the intrinsic relationality of the cosmos, the divine, and the self. Those syntheses were grounded in various forms of religion as manifestation, that is, in a sense of radical participation in the cosmos.

The monotheistic traditions changed but never broke this sense of felt synthesis and intrinsic relationality among God, self, and cosmos and radical participation of the self in the cosmos and in God. Here it is not so much the doctrine of redemption and therefore a principal focus on evil and suffering which prevailed—as it did in the prophetic, proclamatory sense of our sinful distance from the transcendent God at work mysteriously in history and calling all to ethical-political liberating responsibility toward others, especially the oppressed and marginalized. Rather both the patristic and medieval periods (even aspects of Augustine) were dominated by reflection on the doctrine of creation.<sup>17</sup> How could any radically monotheistic tradition with its doctrine of a Creator God assume the continuance, in a new transformed form, of a synthesis of God-self-cosmos? Here was the great challenge of our patristic and medieval ancestors. On the whole, they never lost a sense of radical participation and ordered relationship—the sense I called above a sense of the felt synthesis of God-self-cosmos.

Especially through Platonic resources, the medievals (even the champions of Aristotle like Aquinas) managed to maintain God's radical immanence in nature and humanity without loss of God's transcendence. Recall, for example, the subtlety of medieval discussions not only of efficient causes (as in modern theodicies) but of formal and final causes as well. Recall, above all, how reason (*logos*) for the Christian thinkers like Anselm or Aquinas, and Augustine before them, was never equivalent to modern rationality. Reason for the ancients and medievals was ordinarily understood (and, it seems clear, experienced) as radically participatory in the cosmic and divine (recall Aquinas on reason as created participation in Uncreated Light here). For most patristic and medieval theologians, human being—including human reason as participatory *logos*—was still microcosmos (as for the ancients) and now also *imago dei* for the Christian. Reason was a profoundly participatory reality related to God, cosmos and self.

Augustine here, see G. R., Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup>See David B. Burrell and Bernard McGinn, eds. *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

Modernity changed all this. No synthesis—neither ancient nor medieval—any longer held. As modernity advanced in its more scientific seventeenth-century form and, even more so, its more reified eighteenth-century form, the sense of any radical participation of humanity in an increasingly mechanized cosmos failed. Ancient *logos* and medieval *ratio* became modern rationality. A theodicy built on a patristic or medieval sense of a damaged but cleansed and participatory understanding of reason and *theoria* as vision, and a theodicy built on modern notions of rationality and theory, are two entirely distinct enterprises sharing a deceptively common name. We are the heirs of both. In that heritage lies no little of the confusion of the contemporary debates on theodicy. The medieval synthesis, of course, did not hold. Each element was split away and forced to function increasingly on its own. Cosmos became nature and science adopted a dominating attitude towards it (often encouraged by a reading of Genesis!). God withdrew from the synthesis into ever greater transcendence and hiddenness. The self was divested of its former states as *microcosmos* and possessed increasingly vague memories of its reality as *imago dei*. The self became ever more purely autonomous and isolated from any sense of radical participation in the cosmos or a radical felt relationship to God as creator. Ancient and medieval reason-as-*logos* retreated from any participatory sense with the cosmos and the divine into a narrower and narrower range of what will count as rational and thereby real. Modern theodicies lived on ever more limited notions of what will be allowed to count as rational.

Consider, for example, the relative narrowness of the modern debates on rational approaches to God—that is, what becomes the conflict of the “isms”: deism, modern theism and atheism, modern pantheism and panentheism. Whoever had the best set of rationally endorsed abstract propositions (the preferred form for all modern theodicy) backed by a modern form of argument could be taken seriously—and no one else. It is no surprise that modernity’s first major innovation here was the explicitly nonparticipatory notion of the God-self-world relationship named deism. I do not, however, hold that modernity was simply a disaster on this crucial issue of reason as participatory in the cosmos and the divine. But consider the difficulties. First, rationality now lived by understanding itself as not merely distinguished from but separate from feeling and experience. Theological rationality, as Michael Buckley has argued,<sup>18</sup> separated itself from religious sentiment and communal religious experience. Second, the only form considered appropriate to developing a modern theodicy was the form of modern theory: analytical definitions, rigorous argument, and, as Lonergan said of some of the modern manualists, clear and distinct ideas and very few of them. No other forms—certainly not the laments, the songs, the narratives of suffering peoples nor premodern forms of uniting spirituality and

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<sup>18</sup>Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

theology for theodicy, nor scriptural forms themselves—were adequate, on this reading, for a genuine theodicy. Neither Dostoevsky nor Dante, neither the biblical Ruth nor Job need apply for advancing theodicy. They possessed the wrong form for modern thought. Third, explicitly spiritual exercises<sup>19</sup>—especially those developed by, for example, Irenaeus or Augustine to help transform the mind and cleanse the vision in order to understand suffering, evil, hope, and God—any longer found a place in the functioning of modern philosophical and theological rationality. Unfortunately, at its worst modernity bequeathed us a mechanistic notion of the cosmos, a dominating attitude towards nature, an ever more narrow notion of rationality, culminating in positivism, a increasingly autonomous self become a possessive individualism and a deistic God—a warm kind of deism, perhaps but deism all the same. The prospects for that kind of modern theodicy were not promising. They are now largely spent.

At its best, modern thought made us realize that there is no turning back—in hopeless and intellectually helpless nostalgia—to a simple retrieval of any of the syntheses of the ancients or the medievals. The achievements of modernity—in science and technology, in democratic politics and cultural pluralism, in human rights to resist evil, in sustainable technologies to relieve suffering—should not be denied and must be defended. Any response to evil and suffering that we may today achieve can only be sought by moving through, not around, modernity. The great moderns who sensed and understood this while still attempting to articulate some new hope for humankind grounded in a sense of participation in cosmos and God were those most needing retrieval even today. Their reflections on issues important to theodicy do not, in my judgment, suffer the same fate as the more familiar modern theodicies I have discussed thus far—even though they too prove inadequate to the issues at stake in searching for new forms of either practical or theoretical theodicies.

For modern thought is not only the conflict of the “isms” in most modern theodicies. Modern thought is also defined, from the very beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, by two other major alternatives: the new modern synthesis of Giordano Bruno (the first modern protopanentheist)<sup>20</sup> and the new explosion of the Infinite in Nicolas of Cusa. Just as Bruno’s thought reunites

<sup>19</sup>See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

<sup>20</sup>Bruno, although notoriously difficult to interpret (especially given the hermetic elements in his thought) can be read, I believe, in the way I suggest here. It is interesting that in the debates on modernity (n. 14), both Hans Blumenberg and Louis Dupré employ Cusa and Bruno as emblematic of the move from premodernity to modernity. I find Dupré’s reading of Cusanus far more persuasive than Blumenberg’s famous contrast of the modern Nolan (Bruno) and the troubled Cusan. It is not insignificant that Cusa’s interpretations of both “docta ignorantia” and Infinity have been retrieved in several postmodern discussions in a manner which Blumenberg’s reading of modernity and Cusa should find surprising. On the hermetic elements in Bruno, see Frances S. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

feeling to thought to suggest an early rendition of aspects of such later classic modern panentheisms as Hegel's and Whitehead's, so Cusanus explodes earlier forms of medieval thought into a *docta ignorantia* with the form beyond forms—the Infinite—to suggest contemporary experiments with new forms for Infinity in many postmodern thinkers.

Panentheism—the major innovation on naming and thinking God of modern thought—found two distinct ways to face suffering and evil with hope in God. Hegel,<sup>21</sup> with his fine Lutheran instincts for a theology of the cross, insisted that all serious modern thought must develop a new form for thought. He named this form dialectical in his modern sense, that is, a form rendering, at every moment in thought, what is present in every moment of concrete historical actuality: negativity, conflict, struggle, suffering, cross. Unhappily, Hegel's dialectical optimism (even in Marx) largely won the day over his acute insight into the reality of history as a slaughterbench. There were, of course, Hegelians who resisted this optimism of the *Aufhebung*: Kierkegaard on how individual suffering explodes all totality systems and demands ever new forms for genuinely Christian reflection; Walter Benjamin,<sup>22</sup> as the Marxist kaballist he became, turning against any modern liberal or even Hegelian-Marxist optimism on the dialectical continuities of history. For Benjamin, history, at last, takes the form not of continuity but of interruption held together by the dangerous memory of suffering.

Among the major modern forms of panentheism, however, it was process thought, from Whitehead through Hartshorne and their successors, who rendered explicit the logic of all modern panentheism: the creative suffering God, the great companion of all the suffering.<sup>23</sup> Hence Whitehead's most famous metaphor: God as the fellow sufferer who understands and lures us on to the Good. Where Hegel could appeal to a Pauline theology of the cross to render theologically intelligible his new dialectical form encompassing negativity, conflict, and suffering, so Whitehead could appeal to the Gospel of John and the wisdom traditions of the Old Testament for his biblical hermeneutics of the compassionate God who struggles with and suffers alongside a humankind open to persuasion to the Good and thereby open as well to resistance to evil. In Whitehead<sup>24</sup> the sensibility of

<sup>21</sup>On Hegel, *inter alia*, see the contrasting readings of, e.g., James Yerkes, *The Christology of Hegel* (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, 1978); Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). I intend to return to this debate on Hegel in a forthcoming book on God. For the moment I must rest content with merely asserting my belief that Hegel was a dialectical panentheist even though he never used that self-description.

<sup>22</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illumination*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1977) 253-65.

<sup>23</sup>This is not, of course, a position limited to process theology; see Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology* (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1985).

<sup>24</sup>I emphasize, in this brief analysis of the process position, Whitehead's sensitivity

modern panentheism meets a major strand in our biblical heritage: the compassionate God affecting all and affected by all, the fellow sufferer who understands. Surely this noble Whiteheadian metaphor, however vaguely Edwardian in imagery, is faithful not only to the modern liberal critique of power as coercion in favor of power as persuasion but faithful as well to a central biblical insistence: the compassionate God of hope who loves and thereby suffers with all creatures.

Process thought remains, along with Hegel, one of the major accomplishments of modern theology. Almost every theology today that attempts to face evil and suffering squarely will be, in some sense, an heir of the panentheistic articulation of the biblical vision of the suffering of God as one major theological element needed by contemporary theodicy. And yet process thought—like the strand of modern thought it so well articulates—will not suffice. Part of the difficulty is that process thought is so concerned with developing a metaphysical form for a cosmology rather than history that the evolutionary, process schema appropriate to developing a modern cosmology (as Whitehead, after all, named his work) quietly, almost unintentionally, moves into a process understanding of history. The latter, even when “process” does not become “progress” seems too dependant upon social evolutionary models<sup>25</sup> to provide a form for thought allowing a proper focus on the interruptions in history caused by radical evil and its attendant suffering. More dialectical forms and methods—Moltmann, Metz, Gutierrez, Radford Ruether—have forged various dialectical resources to face two actualities which process thought seems either reluctant to face or unable to address: first, radical historical evil both destructive of all social evolutionary schemas for understanding history and disruptive of all assumed continuities in process;<sup>26</sup> second, a God who acts in history as the prophets and Jesus of Nazareth insisted God does in fact act actively on behalf of the poor and oppressed.<sup>27</sup> The suffering God of process thought who persuades and lures us

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and, often, tentativeness on these issues (at least outside his most systematic work in *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1969). Process philosophy and theology, as Joseph Bracken argues, are not, of course, monolithic on these important issues. The most extensive process theodicy may be found in David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

<sup>25</sup>This difficulty emerges even in the fine attempt of John Cobb in *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).

<sup>26</sup>This has been a consistent motif in the theology of Johann Baptist Metz; for some recent examples, see his essays in Johann-Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity and Modernity*, esp. 3-17, 38-49, 66-72, 79-89.

<sup>27</sup>It is clear that “interventionist” models here are inadequate. Some rethinking of the category of God’s causality in history (as in Lonergan’s theology of the “law of the cross”) is the kind of theoretical element needed for this crucial issue of how God acts in history. See Bernard Lonergan, *De Verbo Incarnato* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1961) 502-43. I hope some Lonerganian theologian one day unites Lonergan’s insights with the insights of Johann-Baptist Metz.

on to the Good is an honorable attempt to rethink earlier modern theodicies in a form more resonant to the central biblical imagery of the God who suffers along with all creation as well as more intelligible to a modern sensibility where change, becoming, process are so central to our scientific and historical understandings of all reality. But modern process theology will not suffice. The reality of evil is too deep in our histories, the all-pervasiveness of suffering too real, the activity against evil so insisted upon in the Bible too central to find sufficient, on inner-Christian grounds and on postmodern grounds alike, this kindly, perhaps all too kindly, modern liberal process vision of the great companion, the fellow sufferer who understands and lures us on to the Good.

For genuinely new resources—for a new form (and thereby new content) for theodicy today—we must learn to see history with new eyes—the eyes of those who have experienced the concrete histories of suffering caused by human evil as well as the concrete history of God's actions on behalf of the oppressed. It is not only that the prophetic strands of our Scriptures call us to this ethical-political-theological task (although surely it is that). It is also (as Simone Weil saw with such clarity)<sup>28</sup> that the suffering often have a more accurate cognitive view of reality: they understand better the necessities that impinge, ultimately, upon us all; they sense more clearly the fragility of the Good; they know the honest beauty of the tragic vision; and then—perhaps only then—they see what Alyosha Karamazov saw—the startling insight into the forms of all forms for the Christian, the God who is love manifested in Jesus the Christ.<sup>29</sup> It is time perhaps for all theologians to learn from an understanding of God, evil, and suffering in the feeling and thought, the new forms and content, the praxis and theories of all those who have suffered, both individually and communally, all those who perhaps act and see far more clearly than modern theologians are able to see with their carefully crafted modern theodicies.

### III. THE SEARCH FOR NEW FORMS FOR THEODICY I: HISTORY AND THE VOICES OF SUFFERING AND HOPE

It is a theological commonplace that the biblical God is the God who acts in history. For the Christian the decisive manifestation of the identity of this God is revealed in the person and event of Jesus the Christ. Through Jesus Christ, Christians understand anew the reality of God as the God of history: the God

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gan's theology of the "lex crucis" to Lonergan's later (*Method in Theology*) reflections in historical causality.

<sup>28</sup>See, especially, her exceptional essays "Human Personality" and "The Iliad or the Poem of Force" in *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Sian Miles (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986) 49-79, 162-96.

<sup>29</sup>See here, especially, "C. Christ the Centre of the Form of Revelation" in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics I. Seeing the Form* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 463-527.

who acted in the Exodus history of ancient Israel is the same God who acted and thereby decisively manifested Godself in the ministry and message, the passion, death, and resurrection of this unsubstitutable Jesus of Nazareth.

But how may contemporary Christians best understand this God who acts in the history of Jesus Christ? In one sense, modern progressive Christian theology has been an attempt to answer that question. Sometimes the answer has been divorced from the actual history of the Jesus in and through whom God has decisively disclosed Godself. The emergence of historical consciousness and thereby the development and use of historical-critical methods in the Bible has proved to be, like all human achievements, ambiguous in its effects upon modern Christian understandings of God and history. On the one hand, the results of historical-critical method have freed Christians to be both more careful and more cautious in their claims for the historical character of the events (whether Exodus, Sinai, or the history of Jesus) related by the Bible. On the other hand, the use of historical-critical methods sometimes removed Christians from paying sufficient attention to the details of the history of Israel and the history of Jesus as those details were narrated by the first communities—above all, for the Christian, in the passion narratives of the New Testament.

This characteristically modern loss of attention to the disclosure of the God of history in the narrative details of the passion and the resurrection narratives can be a loss of the heart of the matter. For where shall we look first for understanding the God of history? As the famous poetic rule observes, God is to be found in the details. Which details? For the Christian, above all, the details narrated by the first Christian communities of this Jesus they proclaimed as the Christ: the biblical narrative details of the ministry and message, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>30</sup> Who is God? In these gospel narratives God is the one who raised this disgraced Jesus from the dead and thus vindicated his ministry and message, life and person as the Christ and, as Jesus Christ, the very manifestation of who God is and who Christians are commanded and empowered to become. Christians may now understand themselves as empowered to hope to find God above all in and through the historical struggle against evil for justice and love—the historical struggle for the living and the dead.

It is hardly surprising that the liberation movements and theologies of our period grounded in listening to and articulating the suffering and the struggle for justice of oppressed peoples are those theologies that best teach all theology to

<sup>30</sup> Protestant theology—especially in the differing theologies of Eberhard Jüngel, Jürgen Moltmann, and Hans Frei—has led the way in the liberating and now widespread Christian theological recovery of the biblical narrative details, not the historically reconstructed narratives of the Bible. For one view of how historical criticism can play a corrective but not constitutive role here, see David Tracy, “On Reading the Scriptures Theologically” in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce D. Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) 35-69.

develop new forms to articulate the content of the dangerous memory of the hope released by the God of history. The form of liberation theology began with Gustavo Gutierrez's brilliant reading of the Exodus narrative and continued through what might be named the new prophetic negative theology for naming God: first name the idols of our period and then we may be able to name God more accurately.<sup>31</sup>

In the liberation and political, the feminist and womanist theologians, contemporary Christian theology has found new forms to render alive its hope in the God of concrete history.<sup>32</sup> This liberating God of history is not identical to the God of modern historical consciousness—a consciousness often driven by an unconscious desire to replace the biblical narratives of the God who acts in history with a modern secretly social evolutionary narrative which may comfort modern religiousness<sup>33</sup> but seems incapable of rendering present any memory of the dangerous God of history.

The God of concrete history is also not identical to the God of existentialist and transcendental historicity. The God of modern Western historicity is disclosed by an analysis of the existential and transcendental conditions of possibility of the modern Western historical subject. A valuable intellectual exercise undoubtedly, but this God of historicity seems far removed from the dangerous and disruptive God of the history narrated in Exodus and in the history of Jesus.

What a curious fate modern Christian theologies of history have undergone. Guided by the honest belief that they were taking history with full seriousness, many theologians began to develop either theologies of historical consciousness (Troeltsch) or theologies of historicity (Bultmann). These theologies were and are serious, necessary, and honorable enterprises. And yet the questions of suffering, evil, and the God of hope recur. Where is the God of history in these modern theologies of historicity and historical consciousness? Where is the conflictual history of ancient Israel and above all where is the history of Jesus as found in the Gospel narratives and remembered and rendered present anew in the Christian liturgy?<sup>34</sup> Where are the conflicts, sufferings, and memories of oppression, the resistance and struggle against evil—all those concrete realities that constitute history as the struggle in hope for justice, freedom, and love? Where is resurrection as the hope for the vindication in history and beyond history of all the living and the dead? Where are the victims of history to whom the God of history

<sup>31</sup>Pablo Richard et al., *The Idols of Death and the God of Life: A Theology* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1983); Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristan, *Where Is God? A Cry of Human Distress* (*Concilium*, 1992/4).

<sup>32</sup>I have expanded on these reflections in the essays for *Concilium* in the volume entitled *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics and Church*, esp. 47-73.

<sup>33</sup>See Johann Baptist Metz, "Suffering Unto God," in *Critical Inquiry* 20/4 (Summer 1994) 611-23.

<sup>34</sup>See David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition*, esp. 3-23, 42-69, 304-53.

narrated in the history of Jesus provides outbursts of laughter, joy, and strength even in suffering as seen in the songs and tales of all struggling, oppressed peoples? Is hope only for the victors who write the histories informing modern historical consciousness?

It would be foolish to turn against the genuine, indeed permanent achievements of the great modern theologies of historical consciousness and historicity. In these theologies we can find the fruits of the great modern experiment: a defense of freedom and rights, an insistence on truthfulness, an honest rejection of the triumphalism of many theologies of history from Eusebius through Bossuet and beyond in favor of the honest, critical, cautious correctives of traditional accounts achieved by the use of historical-critical methods. Surely these accomplishments are one of the permanent achievements of modern theology. At the same time, we are now at a point in our history where the underside of modernity, the dialectic of Enlightenment, must also be honestly acknowledged.<sup>35</sup>

For there is an underside to all the talk about history in modern religion and theology. That underside is revealed in the shocking silence in most theologies of historical consciousness and historicity alike on the evil rampant in history, the suffering of whole peoples, the destruction of nature itself. The history of modern progressive theologies of history is too often a history without any sense of the radical interruptions of actual history, without a memory of historical suffering, especially the suffering caused by the pervasive systemic unconscious distortions in our history—sexism, racism, classism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, Eurocentrism. Modern progressive theologies of history are always in danger of becoming religionized narratives of some other, some happier story than the disruptive and disturbing narrative of the message, ministry, and fate of Jesus of Nazareth.

At their best, modern theologies of history articulate the great continuities of history. In this relatively optimistic account of the teleological continuities of history, modern theologies of history bear certain analogies to Luke-Acts. However, many modern theologies of history, however Lukan in their emphasis on continuity and teleology, read history in a manner far different from the more careful Lukan narrative: history seems relatively free of conflict, interruption, and of suffering. History seems to take the form of an unconsciously evolutionary schema that somehow always leads teleologically to the temporary victors of history, the Western moderns. Then, as was recently announced, history can be declared at an end.

History, on the modern schema, is too often a linear, continuous, teleological form with a single *telos*—Western modernity. In such a schema, God (disguised as one or another “ism”) is part of the schema, the part that provides a

<sup>35</sup>Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury, 1972); Paul Connerton, *The Tragedy of Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

foundation for a theoretical theodicy and thus gives hope and consolation. God, in modern theodicies, is sometimes an important part (theism and panentheism) or sometimes a missing part (atheism and agnosticism) but almost always a part of a wider theoretical form. But what if history is not only continuity but is also deeply constituted by the detours, labyrinths, and interruptions caused by historical evil and massive suffering?<sup>36</sup> What if the modern social evolutionary teleological schema underlying modern self-understanding seems to be finally implausible? Indeed modernity's sense of continuity and confidence has been shattered by two unassimilable elements—the interruption of massive global suffering in modern history and the interruption of all those others set aside, forgotten, and colonized by the grand narrative of Eurocentric modernity.<sup>37</sup>

God enters postmodern history not in the form of a theoretical foundation as a consoling "ism" but as an awesome, often terrifying, hope-beyond-hope. God enters history again not as a new speculation—even a modern trinitarian one!—but as God. Let God be God becomes an authentic cry again. For this God reveals Godself in the form of hiddenness: in cross and negativity, above all in the suffering of all those others whom the grand narrative of modernity has set aside as nonpeoples, nonevents, nonmemories, nonhistory.

God comes first as empowering hope to such peoples and theologies: a God promising to help liberate and transform all reality and promising as well to challenge and overcome the self-satisfied *logos* of modernity. God also comes to these postmodern forms of contemporary theology not only as the Hidden-Revealed God of hope witnessed in the cross, in the memory of suffering and the struggle by, for, and with the forgotten and marginal ones of history. God also comes in giving joy and strength to oppressed peoples in the struggle itself.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Since the predominant emphasis in modern philosophies and theologies of history has been on continuity (e.g., theological theories of development and most understandings of "tradition" as well as modified social evolutionary philosophical understandings of history like John Dewey's or Jürgen Habermas), I have here (as have, e.g., Benjamin or Metz) emphasized the radical discontinuities in history—a more "Markan" and less "Lukan" reading of history. Any adequate account of "history" or "tradition" would demand attention to both continuity and discontinuity. Premodern and modern resources, from this perspective, are real, but inevitably fragmentary resources—they evoke hope but nothing approaching the certitude of either the traditionalist or modernist in their conflictual readings of history's basic continuity. Some of the greatest fragments of memory and hope in history are those "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault) of forgotten and oppressed peoples.

<sup>37</sup>On the theme of "grand narratives," see Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 32-40; on modernity and colonialism, see Enrique Dussel, "Eurocentrism and Modernity" in John Beverley, Jose Ovidio and Michael Aronna, eds. *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995) 65-77.

<sup>38</sup>This theme is especially clear in the classic African-American spirituals and gospel songs. In theology, this theme is especially prominent in womanist theologies (see nn. 7

God also sometimes comes, as the afflicted clearly know, as an ever deeper Hiddenness<sup>39</sup>—the awesome power, the terror, the hope beyond hopelessness sometimes experienced in the struggle itself. Thus does the God of Job speak out of the whirlwind again in Gustavo Gutierrez's profound later reflections on the Hidden-Revealed God of life and thereby hope.<sup>40</sup> Thus does “suffering unto God” and lamentation toward God emerge as a resistance to all modern speculation on suffering in God in the post-Auschwitz, later political theologia of Johann Baptist Metz.<sup>41</sup> The biblical prophetic Hidden-Revealed God at its most fearsome and radical has reentered theological thought again through the reflections of whole peoples and cultures rendered into new forms of theology: new forms needed to disclose this new, uncontrollable content; new forms to render the feelings of suffering, resistance, joy and strength; new forms to allow theory to be grounded in and transformed by the demanding, cleansing, transforming praxis of the struggle whose hope is kept alive in an increasingly apathetic and technologically anesthetized culture. But the entry into history by contemporary theodicists is now not through the estranged and alienated self of the existentialist theologians, those admirable and deeply troubled moderns. The entry of the Hidden-Revealed God now comes through the interruptive experience and memory of suffering itself, above all through the suffering of all those ignored, marginalized, and colonized by the grand narrative of modernity. In the light of that interruption, the modern “isms” for viewing God in modern theoretical theodicies suddenly seem at best inadequate forms for understanding and rendering the content of Christian reflection on evil, suffering, hope, God.

#### IV. CONCLUSION. THE CONTEMPORARY SEARCH FOR NEW FORMS FOR THEODICY II: BACK TO THE FUTURE OF THEOLOGY

The hope of Christians is to resist evil and transform suffering. That hope is grounded in the central Christian metaphor of 1 John 4:16: God is love. The history of Christian reflection on hope, evil, and suffering, at its best, is the history of response to and reflection upon that reality. At times—as in easy sentimentalizations of Christian love, in refusals to face evil and suffering in order to understand what “God is love” might mean—the reality “God is love” evaporates

and 9) and is also articulated with aesthetic poignancy and theological power in Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1987) esp. 82-105.

<sup>39</sup>This great Reformation theme of Luther and Calvin calls for recovery today in a new political theology form. On how important commentary on the Book of Job has been for a sense of God's radical hiddenness, see Susan Schreiner, *When Shall Wisdom Be Found? Calvin's Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>40</sup>See n. 38.

<sup>41</sup>See nn. 26 and 33.

like soft rain on a desert terrain. Some theological reflections on the God of love and hope can begin to take on the form of a mere greeting card: a clear, pleasant, harmless announcement to "have a nice day."

Surely Christian theology needs to continue to study the entire history of Christian theology in order to retrieve the best reflections on what hope might mean for those who believe that, despite all appearances to the contrary, God is indeed love.<sup>42</sup> Above all, as many theologians insist, we need to reflect further on the meaning of the central Christian understanding that God is Love—the trinitarian understanding. Surely it is always important for any Christian response to suffering and evil to remember that God is not only source but always already word and gift. The trinitarian God is experienced as God by Christians in prayer, liturgy, and sacrament as well as in ecclesial readings of the Scriptures. We can insist on a trinitarian understanding of God without, I hope, the kind of strange speculation on theodicy by reflections on the suffering in the inner-trinitarian relations of Father and Son in the distinct theologies of either Balthasar or Moltmann.<sup>43</sup> Rather an insight into the trinitarian understanding of God pervading our liturgy and our prayer may best guide us to a fuller sense of the intrinsic and empowering connections between liturgy and the struggle for justice as La Cugna and Johnson insist in their distinct trinitarian theologies.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>That history would have to include the reflections on the relationships of love and intelligence of our patristic and medieval ancestors. In a work-in-progress on naming and thinking God I hope to show at least some major aspects of that patristic and medieval heritage. In this concluding section of this essay, however, I am far more concerned to summarize, however briefly even, I regret to say, cryptically the results of my researches into the naming and thinking of God in relationship to evil and suffering not by moving "forward" into the tradition (or more exactly, its fragments) but by moving "God is love" back into some of overwhelming and unnerving insights of the biblical and Greek traditions. The extensive documentation needed for this section will be found in four chapters of that forthcoming book. This essay, therefore, must confine the notes to a few principal items.

<sup>43</sup>My point here is not to deny the possibility of Balthasar's and Moltmann's very different-in-content but similar-in-structure theological readings of the biblical accounts of the relationships of the Father and Son in the passion narratives with their different theological speculations on inner-trinitarian suffering of Father and Son. I suppose these speculations can articulate genuine possibilities. However, such reflections seem, to me at least, so speculative and thereby so theologically immodest as to merit the adjective "strange" for this aspect of the work of two theologians whose work I otherwise greatly admire. For Moltmann, *inter alia*, see *The Crucified God* (London: SCM, 1974) 235-41; for Balthasar, *inter alia*, see *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990) esp. 149ff.

<sup>44</sup>See Catherine Mowry La Cugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991) esp. 243-419. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 246-72.

Surely, too, we need to continue to reflect further on the classical resources which our tradition had bequeathed us in order that we may truly understand love and God together: the reflections on *agape* transforming *eros* to become the great form of Catholic *caritas*; the use of the mutually informing insights of intelligence and love to understand God rightly in Augustine and Aquinas;<sup>45</sup> the transformation of ancient neo-Platonic emanation theory into a Christian emanationist “bonum diffusivum sui” form as the understanding of all reality in Bonaventure and so much of the Franciscan love-intoxicated tradition; the reflections on love in all the great love mystics from Bernard, the Victorines, and Hildegard to Theresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux and Teresa of Calcutta; the brilliant rethinking—in so many forms of modern theology from process thought through many modern forms of feminist thought—first of love as relationality and, then, of relationality as the key to all reality including the divine, that is, triune, relational reality; the postmodern reading of love as excess and transgression, that is, as a reality which gives genuine hope today precisely because love cannot be contained by any form of modern rationality.<sup>46</sup> All these—and more—are resources which contemporary Christian theology has at hand in the honest rigorous effort to keep hope alive in our parlous times. Each of these resources deserves—and, happily, many have received—careful attention and development.

And yet, as the logic of my paper thus far suggests, we must also turn not only to the great history of theological reflection following the Johannine insight “God is Love.” We must also go back to texts and traditions before John. We thus turn back driven, of course, by the realities of suffering and evil in all history and in the search for hope in responding to those realities. We are also driven back to earlier scriptural and other ancient resources by the logic of 1 John 4:16 itself. The first letter of John is, after all, the first commentary on John’s gospel. Thus construed, 1 John may be read as the best metaphor which the Christian community coined by meditation on the passion narratives. And so Christian thought is drawn not merely forward into the history of theological forms from First John but backwards—back to the great passion narratives as the central form articulating what Christians mean by their great cry of hope: God is Love.

We are drawn back first to John’s Gospel—that first great meditative narrative on the beauty, indeed glory, manifested in the lifting up of the cross and its unexpected disclosure of both necessity and the Good in something like

<sup>45</sup>The classic reading of Augustine and especially Aquinas here remains Bernard Lonergan’s amazing study of the genuine meanings of intelligence in Thomas Aquinas: *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).

<sup>46</sup>See the feminist theological reflections related to Kristeva and Irigaray (as well as Lacan and Bataille) in the essays in *Transfigurations: Theology and the French Feminists*, ed. C. W. Maggie Kim, Susan M. St. Ville, and Susan M. Simonaitis (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

tragic beauty;<sup>47</sup> we are drawn to Luke and that narrative's history-like, realistic, straightforward call to resist evil, fight for the poor, relieve suffering; we are drawn back to Matthew and his amazing narrative relating word and act beginning with its great discourse of the Sermon on the Mount—that great hymn to Christian hope—and concluding in the steady and pessimistic strains of the Great Judgment scene of the discourse of Matthew 25, the justly classical text of so much liberation theology.

Above all, we are driven today when facing the Hiddleness of God in the history of conflict and suffering to the form of Paul's relentless dialectics of God Hidden in the Cross of Jesus Christ, the Crucified One. And reflection on Paul's theological form of dialectic many yet lead us to face again the uncanny character and strangely formless form of the first of our Gospels—Mark's apocalyptic tale of the eschatological prophet resisting evil demons, healing the marginal and forgotten, speaking truth to power in words which even the disciples almost never seem to understand. This self-interruptive, uncanny Markan form penetrates to the heart of human suffering in the afflicted, frightening cry of the Jesus who resisted evil and lived by hope, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This cry is not the end of Mark's narrative, to be sure, but that afflicted cry from the cross is a defining moment which Christian theologians ignore at the peril of refusing to face the suffering caused by evil and, above all, by the suffering attending resistance to evil.

We may, as Christian theologians, be driven back to still earlier traditions and texts in our searches for new theological forms to respond to suffering, evil, and the God of love after the collapse of the modern forms of theoretical theodicies. We should be drawn back to rethink how to read the New Testament itself anew in the light of both the Old Testament and the Greek classics. Surely it is time for Christians to read our Old, or First, Testament anew.<sup>48</sup> We should also read it as the Tanakh, the book of the Jewish people whose history we

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<sup>47</sup>For myself, on the theoretical side of any genuinely new practical theodicy would be an attempt to reflect further the categories freedom and necessity as appropriate to John's reading of a theology of cross-as-glory in contrast to a Markan-Pauline theology of the cross. Theologically, such reflections might provide the new kind of theological understanding of history as continuity (even necessity) and freedom and radical discontinuity needed to begin to refocus the meanings of the God of Love as both Incomprehensible (with the manifestation, wisdom and mystical traditions) and Hidden (with the prophetic and apocalyptic traditions).

<sup>48</sup>Inter alia, see Walter Lowe, *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993). On Greek tragedy and philosophy, see the now dated but still stunning early work of Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967); several of the essays in Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Lewis Taylor, eds. *Reconstructing Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994) and, for myself, above all the work of Simone Weil (see n. 28). See also Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

presume to graft ourselves upon, the people who new post-Shoah readings of their Scriptures allows us Christians to hear again and rethink how to read with the eyes of the suffering of all history the great psalms of Lament, the Exodus narrative as a tale of liberation, not conquest, the joy and the strength people find in the struggle for justice, the afflicted cries of Jeremiah, the demands for justice of Amos, the shift in the texts we call Isaiah from something resembling triumphalism to the startling portrait of a liberating Suffering Servant. Above all we need to hear Job again and joint not his comforters (all experts in theodicy!). Job demands that we face the whirlwind and often formless realities of both life and God with hope, not the false consolation of a theoretical theodicy.

Moreover, as Christian theologians attempting to think in the later twentieth century on evil, suffering, and hope, we may also attempt to rethink our relationship to our ancient Greek heritage as well.<sup>49</sup> Surely it is time to undo one great fault in early Christian theology's response to the classical Greek heritage: its seeming refusal to aid its own theological reflections on suffering, evil and hope by attending to not only the Greek philosophers but also the great tragedians, especially Aeschylus and Sophocles. Tragedy, as Aeschylus saw with such clarity in all his work, is indeed frightening but can also be an expression of hope—as in the *Oresteia* where we witness the breaking of the cycle of violence and revenge in the founding of a court of justice on the Areopagus. For some of the Greek writers, to be sure, hope (*elpis*) was an entirely deceptive and destructive phenomenon. Whenever *elpis* occurs in the texts of Thucydides, for example, the reader soon learns that disaster is about to occur. For Aeschylus, however—as for Plato in his greatest vision of authentic hope, the *Timaeus*, in contrast to his last despairing work, *The Laws*—hope is genuine. And that Greek hope is not what Nietzsche justly called the “easy optimism of reason” bequeathed to Western culture by the Greeks, the first theoretical theodicists. Nietzsche’s critique rings true for much of our Greco-Roman heritage. But hope in Aeschylus and Plato partakes of the same kind of sensibility pervading Job and Ruth, Mark and John, the startling responses of Joan of Arc to her inquisitors and Sojourner Truth to her inquirers, the foolish wisdom in the Christ-mysticism of the later Tolstoy and in Simone Weil. All those figures and traditions possessed real hope in God for they had forged new forms to express the ancient content of that hope in facing pain by suffering and resisting evil. The opposite of hope is never pessimism nor despair, but apathy—and apathy is the one quality that should never be called a divine form and should never be

<sup>49</sup>For examples of the contemporary theological renaissance of interest in tragedy for theological and philosophical purposes, see Larry D. Bouchard, *Tragic Method and Tragic Theology: Evil in Contemporary Drama and Religious Thought* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989); Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville: Westminster, 1990); Louis A. Ruprecht, Jr., *Tragic Posture and Tragic Vision: Against the Modern Failure of Nerve* (New York: Continuum, 1994).

ascribed as a form of virtue to anyone claiming the name Christian. As our unbelievable century now staggers to a close, appropriately enough with the close of the millennium itself, we can see in the history of our century something like the form of classic tragedy itself—at one and the same time luminous and dreadful in its searing vision of life, as it is relentlessly honest in its promise of hope in the Hidden, Gracious, Incomprehensible God who is Love.

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