

# **God And The Problem Of Evil And Suffering**

**Reverend David P. Bridges**

**For**

**The University of Chicago, Divinity School**

**Fall Quarter 1997**

**Breathed Bridges Best, LLC ©**

## **I. Introduction:**

Today the Holocaust represents the Tremendum in its vastness and total capacity of terror. The Tremendum stands alone as the greatest example of how humanity has inflicted suffering upon humanity. “I call the death camps the Tremendum, for it is the monument of a meaningless inversion of life to an orgiastic celebration of death, to a psychosexual and pathological degeneracy unparalleled and unfathomable to any person bonded to life” <sup>1</sup> “I have done everything I can to make the death camps not only unique, incomparable, *sui generis*, but, more to the point beyond the deliberations of reason, beyond the discernment of moral judgment, beyond meaning itself.” <sup>2</sup> Arthur A. Cohen in his book The Tremendum believes that the Holocaust is evil and has set the ultimate precedent for human suffering throughout the course of recorded history.

However, the true story which will unfold throughout this paper depicts a more personal suffering in the pastoral context of a suburban parish. This true story of suffering was inflicted upon a young high school girl in the youth program of the parish I served. “Preparations for suicide emerge without transition from everyday activities, activities that appear normal, and the suicide itself occurs with the same love for order, same tidiness, the same straightforwardness and mute hopelessness that characterizes the life that caused it.” <sup>3</sup> The senseless suffering of the victims of the Holocaust, involving their family members, must have been equally as horrified and terror stricken as the encounter which I and the affected family experienced as a result of a suicide. However, this suffering is subjective and not objective in regards to understanding the experience first hand.

One year ago I was working late in my parish church when a panic stricken women rushed into my office looking for a pastor in the church. I invited her to sit in my office, but she explained that there was no time for conversation. She explained that there had been a horrible accident a few short blocks from the church and that I needed to get over to this family’s home as quickly as possible. I found the address of the home and thanked the woman, while rushing to my car. I arrived at the scene of the accident to find police surrounding the house. I explained I was the family’s pastor and that I had come on behalf of the church.

The family, which consisted of two young high school girls, their mother and father were regular attendees at the church. The policeman explained that there had been a shooting in the garage behind the house a short time before I had arrived on the scene. The father of the household had just placed a handgun to his head and shot himself in one violent act of suicide. They told me

that the two daughters and the mother could be found at the local emergency room of the nearby hospital.

I returned to my car, trembling with fear and uncertainty, and drove myself to the hospital. I was close to the younger of the two daughters. When I arrived in the private waiting room of the hospital she immediately looked up and ran over to me with tears flowing like a waterfall from her swollen and reddened eyes. I held her for a while and then we both sat together on chairs in the private room. There was not much to say during the trauma of such a horrifying moment. I knew what needed to be said would come throughout the course of the next year of pastoral care.

I attended the funeral in the church memorial garden. The father and family had been faithful parishioner for many years. After the funeral, I saw the youngest daughter on a weekly basis for the next eight months. I worked with her on many issues which resulted from our conversations over this time period. Some of the early issues were pertaining to where her father was now and how I knew that he was in heaven. After establishing a relationship of trust she began to tell the story of suffering that ended in her father's taking his life on that cold and dark November night. His suicide ended suffering for him and began a whole new saga of suffering for this young girl and her family.

The reason that the suffering was so intense and painful was because of the love and bond a father and daughter share uniquely between themselves. Equally as powerful was the permanent separation from the love which the daughter was given by the father. "Every thing else recedes as unessential, the person becomes totally preoccupied with his suffering...nothing matters any more outside of the one thing. Extreme suffering turns a person in on himself completely; it destroys his ability to communicate. There is really nothing one can say about this night of pain."<sup>4</sup> The suffering and pain which I empathetically experienced was more personal and tragic because I could feel the sorrow and pain as I counseled this young girl in my office. I was the only person who had read her father's suicide letter, written weeks in advance of the night and dropped in the mail just hours before his death. I pushed my spirit to stay in touch with her sorrow and pain, week after week, as I became an empathetic listener and co-griever in her tragic story of suffering and lose.

How is it possible that an omnipotent and omni-benevolent God could allow such a premeditated evil suicide to strike at the tender life of such an innocent young girl? Was the death a result of turning away from the 'good' toward sin and evil? Did God foreknow that this event would take place in this girl's life at the exact time and place which it occurred? Where was God in the private hospital emergency room, as the family sat in utter horror and terror? The struggle to answer these questions from a Process Theology perspective will be the subject of this paper.

## **II. Theistic "Original Sin" Flawed Human Nature -As Source Of Evil & The Historic Immutable, Unchangeable, Non-Suffering Image of God:**

Augustine taught and believed that the flawed human nature caused all suffering in the world.

“Now unless I am mistaken, our argument showed that we do evil by free choice of the will.” 5 Human sinful free will is the root of all evil acts in the world and this paradigm is derived from Adams fallen state and his original sin in the Garden of Eden. “For we have our existence from God, and it is from him that we deserve punishment for doing wrong and reward for doing good...The very fact that anyone who uses free will to sin is divinely punished shows that free will was given to enable human beings to live rightly.” 6

The logical question that follows Augustine’s teaching is why was God punishing this young girl and was it the case that the father and the daughter were not living rightly? Augustine’s theodicy would imply that because the father, by free will, chose to commit suicide he was acting upon evil sinful impulses innately within the flawed human spirit. Furthermore, he was being punished and the young girl was being punished because they were not living rightly in God’s eye. “What is evil is the turning of the will away from the unchangeable good and toward changeable goods. And since this turning is not coerced, but voluntary, it is justly and deservedly punished with misery.” 7

There was certainly misery and suffering which resulted from the father’s will, moving away from the good and the unchangeable God! According to Augustine, all the evil which resulted from the suicide occurred because of Adams original sin. This sin was past from generation to generation and only Christ, the Second Adam, redeemed our sinful flawed nature upon the cross. The punishment and misery which resulted from the suicide was just due to the father’s sinful and evil flawed nature?

However, there are other voices in the struggle to understand evil who would look upon this Augustinian theodicy as depicting a sadistical image of God. “The logic of this sadistic understanding of suffering is hard to refute. It consists of three propositions which recur in all sadistic theologies: 1) God is the almighty ruler of the world, and he sends all suffering; 2) God acts justly, not capriciously; and 3) all suffering is punishment for sin...It follows from the just way in which the Almighty acts that he torments only ‘with good reason,’ even when his torments no longer bear any relation to the wrong that was committed. The two presuppositions that God is both almighty and just lead to the conclusion that all suffering has to be punishment for sin.” 8 To understand this theodicy, one must give a meaningful purpose to suffering. If it is understood as a means to bring us back to a correct relationship with God, then suffering is understood to be a test that we are challenged to pass and incorporate into our life as a school lesson is incorporated into our thought process.

This voice goes on to explain Christian masochism in the following light: “This sadistic perspective is to be distinguished from Christian masochism... which considers God not only just but loving. Masochism’s presuppositions that God is almighty (proposition one), and loving and just (proposition two), lead to the conclusion that all suffering serves either to punish, test, or train. It is God’s way of drawing near to us in order to win souls for himself.” 9 To summarize Augustinian theodicy in light of sadistical and masochistic thinking, theologically we are worshiping the executioner, who is God the tester of our faith. This testing premise will be addressed in the new light of Process Thought. But, first a grounding in the historical image of

God as apathetic, unmovable, immutable and omnipotent.

The Stoic Philosopher's image of God or the Unmoved Mover and First Cause of all things impacted the thinking of Marcus Aurelius, which impacted Augustine, which impacted Meister Eckhardt and ultimately the Reformers image of God. The key term which influenced the Theistic Tradition down through the ages was the Greek term *apatheia*. This term means indifference, referring to the inability to feel any emotions whatsoever. "Apatheia is the Greek word that literally means non-suffering, freedom from suffering, a creature's inability to suffer." **10** The idea that God was apathetic to human suffering and the world is picked up in the thought of Marcus Aurelius.

Marcus Aurelius was born in 121 A.D.. He succeeded the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius in 161 A.D.. He was trained in rhetoric, and, being more serious-minded, Marcus turned away from rhetoric and focused on philosophy. Marcus became increasingly religious in his writings and spoke in terms of divine care and of *Logos* or *Reason* as an almost personal god. He was almost as well known as a writer as he was an emperor. His greatest work, The Meditations, was completed sometime before his death in 180 A.D..

Marcus Aurelius, in the following quote, defines 'high-mindedness', "'High-mindedness' meant the elevation of an individual's thoughts above the stirring of the flesh whether pleasurable or painful, above vainglory, death, and all other such things." **11** His teaching illustrates how Stoics devalued the fleshly temporal world and all that is within it. Anything of this world such as suffering, feeling or empathy for others and any form of emotion is devalued because it is of this world. According to the Stoics the human mind set should be set upon becoming virtuous through apathetic Reasoning, which was congruent with the image of God, the Unmoved Mover (Aristotle). For the Stoics, becoming like God entailed being emotionless, non-suffering, immutable, of reason and unchangeable. All of these attributes were given to God, and these attributes formed the image of the Theistic God of the Tradition.

Augustine furthered this thinking of the Tradition. He was born in 354 A.D. in Thagaste, North Africa. He became a Neoplatonist because it offered Augustine a more satisfactory solution to the problem of evil. Evil did not even exist, there was only the good image of God: "The truest beginning of piety is to think as highly of God as possible; and doing so means that one must believe that he is omnipotent, and not changeable in the smallest respect; that he is the creator of all good things, but is himself more excellent than all of them; that he is the supremely just ruler of everything that he created; and that he was not aided in creating by any other being, as if he were not sufficiently powerful by himself." **12**

Augustine was the father of Western Christianity, consequently, the Theistic Traditional understanding took root in his teachings and in his Neoplatonistic image of God, which was grounded in the Stoic image of God. God was destined to become an apathetic, high-minded, reasoning being completely removed from any attributes which were temporal or worldly.

Meister Eckhardt was born in Saxony, Prussia, in the year 1260 A.D.. He was also a Neoplatonic thinker and a mystical Dominican monk. Martin Luther used many of his sermons in his Reformed teachings. Eckhardt said, “Here you should know that true detachment is nothing else than for the spirit to stand as immovable against whatever may chance to it of joy and sorrow, honor, shame and disgrace, as a mountain of lead stands before a little breath of wind. In his immovable detachment man is brought into the greatest equality with God, because God has it from his immovable detachment that he is God, and it is from his detachment that he has his purity and his simplicity and his unchangeability...When the Son in his divinity wished to become man, and became man, and suffered his passion, that affected God’s immovable detachment as little as if the Son had never become man.” **13**

The image of God that has been passed down through the Theistic Tradition and the patriarchal teachers in opposition to the God found in the Bible. The concept of a suffering God on the cross is a break from the Theistic image of God. On the cross God became fleshly, visible, mortal, and suffering, and all of these attributes contradicted the Traditional image of God. How is it possible for Meister Eckhardt to believe that God was completely unmoved by the death of his own Son upon a cross? This understanding of a detached cold and stoic God is real and it is the most prevalent image of God found in Christian culture and church circles.

Dorothee Soelle in her book Suffering defines how the Christian God became a God who did not suffer and was removed from the creation. “Suffering, pathos, belongs in the realm of the earthly, in a narrower sense as suffering and pain, in a wider sense as the emotions, drives, and passions. God is untouched by all these. Neither the drives nor compulsions that follow from them can affect him... Understood ethically, his apathy signifies his spirit’s freedom from internal needs and external injuries. According to Aristotle one aspect of God’s perfection is that he has no need for friends. This apathetic God became the God of the Christians, although he was a contradiction to the biblical God, with his emotions and suffering.” **14**

### **III. The Biblical Warrants and the Traditional Seam of the Bible:**

Soelle believes that the understanding of God as being apathetic became more and more accepted throughout the first and second Christian millenniums. This image of God was accepted despite the Biblical logic which is totally contrary to the Stoic logic. The Biblical notion according to Inbody states, “Because I am God, my compassion grows!” **15** How then could the Theistic Tradition, for two millennium, have missed seeing this vulnerable, empathetic and suffering image of God? Professor Burton Cooper in his book Why God? begins to mine the other Biblical shaft which depicts a Process image of the divine Godhead. “The Bible responds profoundly to the deepest problems of life and faith but that does not mean that the Bible has one answer, or a final answer, or even consistent answers to the problem of God, power, and evil...Perhaps the Bible is more like a deep coal mine with many seams, some of which are rich with coal, others are not.” **16**

The seam of divine vulnerability in the Bible would suggest that God is affected by the suffering of the world and the faithful within the world. What Israel does matters to God and has an impact upon the Consequential aspect of God. “God is a lover and the prophet Hosea portrays God not

as an invulnerable judge, but as a loving husband who feels the pain of his wife's (Israel's) harlotry (2:1-13), or as a betrayed father who suffers from his son's (Israel's) abandonment (11:1-4)." 17

These images from the Old Testament affirm a new image of God which is affected by human suffering and moved to empathetically love the world and the humans in the world. The following Burton Cooper quote explains how God is empathetic and suffering: "It is the relation of love and justice to each other that accounts for God's vulnerability to suffering...analogously- but only analogously- a music lover suffers upon hearing music played off-key. God suffers with the victims of injustice as a loving wife suffers when her husband bears undeserved affliction. And God suffers with the punishment of the unjust as a loving father suffers even when his children are only getting their just deserts... it would be truer to say that love and justice can be together in God because God is vulnerable." 18 Assigning these attributes to God tends to make God more human than divine, however, there is precedent for the divine becoming human, Jesus Christ.

The following is a New Testament references to a compassionate and empathetic God, from the Gospel according to Mark 15: 33-34, "And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'E'lo-I, E'lo-I, la'ma sabach-tha'ni?' Which means, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'" Here in the greatest moment of human suffering know to mankind, death on a cross, the human spirit in Christ called out to the divine spirit of God! Here nailed upon a cross the immutable, unchangeable, stoic, unmovable God became vulnerable, weak, suffering, empathetic and erotic because God was in relationship to the human condition. In the Gospel according to John 10:30, Christ said: "I and the Father are one." Thus God knew suffering and pain on the cross of Christ.

Job is healed when a new image of God appears to him when he can let go of that Traditional Theistic image of God. He is healed because in letting go of that image of an omnipotent power, he is letting go of the image of God as the enemy. Cooper goes on to say concerning Job, "The 'thee' that he sees in 'Now my eye sees thee' is God the friend, the vulnerable one who suffers with him in his suffering and whose caring presence heals him." 19 Many Medieval scholars compare Job with Jesus and there are many parallels between the two Biblical characters and their suffering. Most importantly what we can learn from both Job and Jesus on a cross is that God does indeed suffer and God is empathetic to our human suffering!

#### **IV. Process Theology and A Suffering & Empathetic Image of God:**

The Process understanding of God is as Biblical as the Theistic Traditional image of God, but seldom understood. It is believed that a Process God is anthropomorphic, vulnerable, weak, changeable, empathetic and capable of suffering. Instead, God needs to be understood, "Here by the theme love toward God, toward one who certainly is not over us like a perfect being but one who is in the process of becoming, as is everything we love." 20 Through a Process understanding of God there is a God involved in the world and affected by the world, who

suffers when humanity and the world suffers. To understand Process a few terms need to be explained in order to see how God can be empathetic and suffering yet remain God.

God is involved in the world through the sending of *initial aims* which are God's internal presence in our lives and action in the world, traditionally known as God's Grace. The initial aims of God are present to every human being throughout the entire world. God is engaged in persuasively luring the creation forward by giving to each person, throughout the journey of their lifetime, the aims which are best for them at that particular moment in time. Individuals then choose, based upon free will, which path or aims to follow. God continually lures us forward in a loving direction every moment of our existence. Because God provides all aims, God is still sovereign and all knowing of every possibility for the future. God is lovingly dedicated to creating aims that are the ultimate, in order to produce love, harmony, intensity and intrinsic value in individual's lives and in the greater cosmos of the natural world order.

Understanding initial aims is key to understanding Process thought. Equally as important to Process is understanding the two natures of God through which God creates and redeems the world. The Consequential and the Primordial natures of God are developed for a systematic view of God with two aspects. There is an aspect (Primordial) of God that is envisioning, above the world, eternal, creative and living. God is the eternal basis for both God's creative activity in the world, the source of all initial aims and knower of all possibilities. This aspect is above the world and goes before the world. Then there is an aspect (Consequential) of God that is temporal or knowing what happens as it happens, historical, relating, and growing which risks participation in the world. God who knows our feelings as we experience them and is empathetic to what happens to individuals, as it happens.

Dr. David Griffin who wrote Process Theology an Introductory Exposition rejects the idea of the omnipotence of God on biblical, philosophical, and theological grounds. To comprehend an omnipotent God one must then give all future tragedies and events into the all knowing mind of God. In allowing God to have such coercive control over the cosmos, God becomes the author and creator of evil events which cause suffering to the human condition. This understanding of God is dialectically opposed to an omni-benevolent God. In opposition to God as omnipotent, Inbody says: "Preexistent actualities might well have some power of their own which could thwart the divine will, and there might be some eternal principles about the way these actualities can be ordered that limit the sort of situations that are really possible." **21**

Both Griffin and Inbody present a new image of God which is manifested in and through a created universe of cause and effect reflecting a world of natural order, a world which is becoming, of novelty, of change, of development of a degree of freedom. This image of God is open to, "Scientific Reasons which explain why bodily pain and mental anguish and social oppressions occur" **22** Process Theology removes God from a stoic untouchable throne by having God, in the consequential and the primordial aspects, knowing what happens in the world at the moment it happens and being affected by what happens in the world.

God is essentially limited in God's power and is self-limiting because there are natural laws which God placed in the world and which God honors by choosing to be self-limiting. Inbody goes on to say, "God freely and voluntarily gives up some of the power God alone possesses, although God can and does sometimes wield that omnipotent power unilaterally even now (as with miracles), and /or will reassert it as divine justice and victory at the end (the eschaton)...the ontological limitation on the power of God is inherent in the structure of the world...God can not unilaterally eliminate evil." **23** This Process understanding of the world is helpful in dealing with human suffering and evil in the world. A self-limiting God is not omnipotent and unilaterally powerful which is defined as a power of coercive force, my will over your will. Instead the new image of God is one of, "erotic power which is the power of primal interrelatedness in an 'ontic category,'" **24**

Inbody further elaborates on the difference between omnipotent and erotic power in the following quote: "Strength is not the ability to control and hold things external to oneself or to get one's way, the ability to master through individual heroic might. Power, as a primary psychological, social, and ontological concept, is the ability to get along with others and to get things done, the ability to shape each other through the mutual empowerment of a relationship. When erotic power is denied or crushed, it then produces dominance and control...Erotic power is the ability to feel our deepest passions in all aspects of our lives. It is the basic yearning for others and for self-discovery." **25** Power is defined as a social and relational idea because all of reality is conceived socially or relationally. Because the world is social and relational, the nature of God must be more clearly defined along the lines of erotic power, not omnipotent power.

How process works in real life helps to explain suffering and evil in a world of scientific reason. The primordial aspect of God has nothing that happens taking God by surprise. Humans have self-determination or free will, hence, God knows all possibilities and the knowledge of the possible in the present moment. The Consequential aspect of God knows actual events in relation to all things as they achieve actualization, as they happen in the present moment. Through the Primordial aspect, God knew of the possibility for the event to happen. God is among the influences affecting our decisions, representing for us the power to bring in a future which is more than the repetition of the past.

God is one reality, both primordial and consequential, combined in the present moment. God has boundless and sovereign knowledge in that God knows all possibilities, but God does not control or has not thought out exactly what will happen next in our lives. God knows the possibilities because God has sent us the Initial Aims. However, humans have subjective aims, humans act according to their own free will. God persuades us toward the most loving, harmonious possibilities, but does not control our free will and our lives.

God always wills the best possible good to occur in every situation, but cannot unilaterally cause humans to choose the best initial aim to happen in their lives. "God experiences in God's consequent nature the immediate experience of every actuality, saves what is good out of that experience in God's primordial nature, and lures the best possible satisfaction in the next actual occasion by presenting a new initial aim." **26** This is basic Process thought which explains how

God is all knowing of every possibility and yet not responsible for the suffering and evil which occurs in the world and to individuals.

Inbody believes, “Suffering and evil are intrinsic to the creation itself, not an intrusion or a corruption of the creation...My thesis is that this correlation between the capacity to enjoy and the capacity to suffer is a necessary metaphysical correlation, inherent in the nature of things.”  
**27** Nature has a creativity and randomness or an element of disorder in its own inherent nature. Dr. Martha Nussbaum of The University of Chicago, believes that misfortune or chance or bad luck mix with sin and injustice in order to explain why some bad things and good things happen to individuals. As Nussbaum says, “Matters are rarely so clear. Many cases of human suffering for which we seek to assign blame are due to misfortune, and cannot be imputed to any human (or divine) agency.”  
**28** Inbody believes there is, “reciprocity between law and luck which introduces a feature of tragedy into the world. There is room within the divine creativity and will for a ‘tragic vision.’”  
**29** The introduction of chance, misfortune and luck are all possibilities which exist out side the coercive control of an omnipotent God. This is a helpful aspect of Process’s understanding of reality which allows evil to be a part of the world and not an intrusion into the world.

#### **V. Conclusions on Suffering and Process Theology:**

A new understanding of God must break into the archaic Theistic Tradition because this old image of God is no longer a viable image of God for the rational and scientific evolving human consciousness of the 21st Century. “God did not kill our baby in her crib or trigger a malignancy in my mother’s body or force your child to take drugs, or exile a group into slavery in order to punish them for their sins or teach them a lesson. God created a world in which natural processes of cause and effect inexorably lead, under the right circumstances, to crib death, cancer, addiction, and oppression until other processes of healing, reconciliation, grace, and liberation modify, negate, or transform the original set of circumstances into a new creation.” **30**

It is impossible to remove human life from suffering, unless one removes oneself from life itself, as the father of our story decided to do in one horrible suicidal moment that dark and cold November night. God undergoes our suffering with us in order to transform it within us, this is a central tenant to the doctrine of Trinity. “The biblical and theological answer to human suffering is not the conquest from without but rather from within, not the conquest of omnipotence or brute power but the endurance and transformation of suffering love...The suffering of God has become the ‘new orthodoxy.’” **31** Hence, it was in the church office that the erotic and transformative love of the cross met the two of us over a year ago. The love of Christ and God, the reading of scriptures, the love of the community is what ultimately transformed this evil suicidal event. The resurrection is not only a divine action, it is also a part of God. The divine life has incorporated death into itself. The resurrection is the transformation of death through its incorporation into the divine life.

Divine power is the power of the cross and the power of the resurrection to transform death, suffering, and evil into the reign of God. According to Process Theology God redeems the suffering of the world in a number of ways: “1) by experiencing in God’s consequent nature the

good as well as the evil that has been achieved in the world; 2) by transforming in God's primordial nature the events creatures have wrought by selecting from them new possibilities for the future; 3) by seeking richer value by the presentation of new aims in each new situation; and 4) by strengthening the good that is achieved so that the balance between good and evil will be enlarged." **32**

Inbody speaks of the cross and the resurrection using the following language: "Trinity speaks of God in relation to the incarnation and the death of Jesus. God suffered in the suffering of Jesus; God died on the cross of Christ, so that we might live and rise in God's future....God's being is in suffering, and the suffering is in God's being itself because God is love...Furthermore, God does not suffer like creatures; creatures suffer unwillingly, but in Christ God voluntarily opens God-self to the possibility of being affected by another...this is an active not a passive suffering." **33** It is through our relatedness to God and our relatedness to each other that we are able to withstand the forces of evil that invade our lives when we least expect evil to invade.

The conclusions lie in the empathetic fact that Christ's tragic involvement in the world's evil is grounded in the love of God. God so loved the world that he gave to it his only begotten Son, even unto suffering with it and because of it. Yet that suffering has healing power in creating a community of love and forgiveness which lives to overcome the evil in the world. The Church is an eternal lasting presence of a community which seeks to overcome evil and suffering by empathetic and compassionate love in the name of Jesus Christ. The cross finally breaks our old Theistical Traditional image of God and provides us with a new image of vulnerability, the image of a God who redeems us not by coercive power but by suffering with us.

Dorothee Soelle adds that "God is not the mighty tyrant. Between the sufferer and the one who causes the suffering, between the victim and the executioner, God, whatever people make of this word, is on the side of the sufferer...God is not in heaven; he is hanging on the cross. Love is not an otherworldly, intruding, self-asserting power, which means to mediate on the cross can mean to take leave of that dream." **34** Tyron Inbody puts his claim bluntly: "The concept of the suffering God is intrinsic to the Christian idea of God, for the Christian God finally is not the God of classical theism but the biblical, Trinitarian, and Process God. God is not defined by aseity or impassibility or immutability or omnipotence; God is defined as the triune relational God of suffering and transforming love...to persuade and to re-create...God does not look on our suffering from the outside but from within, from the brow and hands of Jesus hanging on the cross." **35**

The Christian vision of the world offers finally the reality of grace in the midst of suffering. "In the cross, power is the power of identification, participation, endurance, and transformation. The theology of Bethlehem and Golgotha, then, is central to the Christian interpretation and response to human suffering. That is God's way of overcoming the destructive powers of our world." **36** "Loneliness, limitations, temptation, and anxiety are part of what it means to be human; chance and bad luck are a part of a free and finite world; death is part of the structures of existence; God shows on the cross that these also exist in the very heart of God" **37** "The God who is the lover of life does not desire the suffering of people, not even as a pedagogical device, but instead their

happiness.” 38

“In a certain sense learning presupposes mystical acceptance: the acceptance of life, an indestructible hope. The mystics have described how a person could become free and open, so that God is born within the depths of his soul; they have pointed out that a person in suffering can become “calm” rather than apathetic, and that the capacity for love is strongest where it grows out of suffering...The sufferers have no more to lose at the hands of fate; they are through with the God who is understood as an alien being who controls every thing. They have everything to gain, not as a gift given them from outside but as a change within themselves, the strength of the weak...all who learn in suffering, who use their experiences to overcome old insights, who experience their own strength and come to know the pain of the living in the realm of the dead, they are beginning the exodus.” 39

Redemption does not come to people from outside or from above. God wants to use people in order to work on the completion of his creation, to bring about the spiritual healing of the young girl in the story. For this reason God must also suffer with the creation. To see God as the Unmoved Mover above the creation is an old and archaic understanding of who God is and what God can be in and through the creation. “A new Christian perspective on the problem of evil. God does not cause our suffering, God does not will our suffering. God identifies with our suffering and works faithfully, everlastingly, and infallibly to transform our suffering into the highest possible good or into life lived within the realm of God’s resurrection. This is the distinctively Christian answer to the problem of evil and suffering.” 40

## **ENDNOTES**

1. Cohen, Arthur. *The Tremendum*. New York, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company., 1993. p.19
2. *Ibid*, p.16-17
3. Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press., 1975. p.61
4. *Ibid*, p. 69
5. Saint Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993. p. 27
6. *Ibid*, p. 29-30
7. *Ibid*, p. 68

8. Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press., 1975. p. 24
9. *Ibid*, p. 24
10. *Ibid*, p.36
11. Aurelius, Marcus. *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company., 1983. p.11
12. Saint Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993. p. 4
13. Eckhart, Meister. *Meister Eckhart*. Translated by Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press., 1981. p. 288-289
14. Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press., 1975. p.42
15. Inbody, Tyron. *The Transforming God*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press., 1997. p.146
16. Cooper, Burton. *Why God?*. Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press., 1988. p.44
17. *Ibid*, p. 48
18. *Ibid*, p.50
19. *Ibid*, p.58
20. Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press., 1975. p.92
21. Inbody, Tyron. *The Transforming God*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press., 1997. p.148
22. *Ibid*, p.126
23. *Ibid*, p.149
24. *Ibid*, p.136
25. *Ibid*, p.136
26. *Ibid*, p.151
27. *Ibid*, p.153
28. *Ibid*, p.128
29. *Ibid*, p.132
30. *Ibid*, p.127
31. *Ibid*, p.166
32. *Ibid*, p.156
33. *Ibid*, p.171
34. Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press., 1975. p.148
35. Inbody, Tyron. *The Transforming God*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press., 1997. p.177
36. *Ibid*, p.180
37. *Ibid*, p.181
38. Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press., 1975. p.108
39. *Ibid*, p.127
40. Inbody, Tyron. *The Transforming God*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press., 1997. p.188

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Saint Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993.

Aurelius, Marcus. *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*. Translated by G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company., 1983.

Cohen, Arthur. *The Tremendum*. New York, New York: The Continuum Publishing Company., 1993

Cooper, Burton. *Why God?*. Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press., 1988.

Eckhart, Meister. *Meister Eckhart*. Translated by Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press., 1981.

Inbody, Tyron. *The Transforming God*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press., 1997.

Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press., 1975.