

SATAN AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL



CONSTRUCTING
A TRINITARIAN
WARFARE
THEODICY

GREGORY A. BOYD

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*This book is dedicated to my loving father,
Edward K. Boyd,
who surrendered his life
to Jesus Christ at the age of seventy-three.
You taught me to feel the painful injustice
that permeates the world.
I praise God that you now live with
the hope that this injustice
will someday come to an end.*

A Word of Appreciation

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979.
<i>ATJ</i>	<i>Ashland Theological Journal</i>
<i>BARev</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Neuen Testament
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CD</i>	Karl Barth. <i>Church Dogmatics</i> . Edited and translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-1977.
<i>CTQ</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>EBC</i>	<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> . Edited by F. E. Gaebelcin. 12 vols. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976-1992.
ETSMS	Evangelical Theological Society Monograph Series
FC	The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947.
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LTQ</i>	<i>Lutheran Theological Quarterly</i>
NIB	The New Interpreter's Bible. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994-.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
POS	Pretoria Oriental Series
<i>RelS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Studia theologica</i>
<i>Them</i>	<i>Themelios</i>
<i>ThTo</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

INTRODUCTION

*I freely admit that real Christianity . . .
goes much nearer to Dualism than people think. . . .
The difference is that Christianity thinks this Dark Power was created by God,
and was good when he was created, and went wrong.
Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war.
But it does not think this is a war between independent powers.
It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion,
and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel.*
C. S. LEWIS, *MERE CHRISTIANITY*

The Bible uniformly teaches that God is the Creator of all that is and the sovereign Lord of history (e.g., Gen 1:1; Deut 10:14; Ps 135:6-18; John 1:3; Acts 17:24-27; Eph 1:11; Col 1:16-17). At times he exercises unilateral control over what transpires in history, miraculously intervening to alter the course of nations or of individuals, even predestining some events long before they come to pass (e.g., Is 46:10-11; Acts 2:23; 4:28). Because God is omnipotent, his goal of acquiring a “bride” (the church) and establishing an eternal kingdom free from all evil certainly will be achieved someday (e.g., 1 Cor 15:25-28; Eph 1:16-23; Col 1:18-20; Rev 20:10). In sum, Scripture’s majestic portrayal of God is that of a sovereign, omnipotent Creator who is confidently guiding the world toward his desired end.

Because of this clear biblical witness, many Christians have concluded that, in order for God to accomplish his goal for creation, *everything* that happens in world history must somehow fit into his sovereign plan. This assumption has permeated much of the church’s theology and piety throughout most of its history. It is expressed, for example, in many traditional hymns that reassure us that God is in control and is working out his

purposes no matter what happens to us.¹ The assumption is also expressed in clichés Christians are prone to recite in the face of suffering. When confronting tragedies such as cancer, crippling accidents or natural disasters, believers sometimes attempt to console themselves and others by uttering truisms such as “God has his reasons,” “There’s a purpose for everything,” “Providence writes straight with crooked lines,” and “His ways are not our ways.” The same assumption to some extent permeates our broader culture as well, as evidenced, for example, by the fact that insurance policies customarily refer to natural disasters as “acts of God.”

The assumption that there is a divine reason behind everything has also been frequently espoused by some of the church’s chief theologians. For example, Augustine, arguably the most influential theologian in church history, expressed this assumption in strong terms when he wrote, “to God . . . all wills . . . are subject, since they have no power except what He has bestowed upon them. The cause of things, therefore, which makes but is not made, is God.”² Again, “the will of the Omnipotent is always undefeated.”³ “Nothing happens unless the Omnipotent wills it to happen,” according to Augustine.⁴ Even evil deeds must be allowed by God for a specific good purpose.⁵ Hence, Augustine encouraged Christians who had been victimized by others to find consolation in the knowledge that their oppressors could not have harmed them as they did unless God allowed it for a greater good.⁶

¹Consider, for example, Lloyd’s famous hymn, “My Times Are in Thy Hand”: “My times are in thy hand / Whatever they may be / Pleasing or painful, dark or bright / As best may seem to thee / My times are in thy hand / Why should I doubt or fear? / My Father’s hand will never cause / His child a needless tear.” To cite another example, with Sandell’s famous hymn, “Day by Day and with Each Passing Moment,” we sing: “The protection of his child and treasure / Is a charge that on himself he laid / As thy days, thy strength shall be in measure / This the pledge to me he made . . . / Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting / E’er to take, as from a father’s hand / One by one, the day, the moments fleeting / Till I reach the promised land.”

²Augustine *City of God* 5.9 (NPNF 1 2:92).

³*Enchiridion*, Library of Christian Classics, ed. J. Baille, J. McNeill and H. P. Van Duren, trans. A. C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), 7:400.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 395.

⁵“In their very act of [wicked people] going against [God’s] . . . will,” Augustine holds, “his will is thereby accomplished . . . for it would not be done without his allowing it—and surely his permission is not unwilling, but willing” (*ibid.*, p. 389).

⁶According to Augustine, the victim “ought not to attribute [his suffering] to the will of men, or of angels, or of any created spirit, but rather to His will who gives power to wills” (*City of God* 5.10 [NPNF 1 2:93]). Even the premature death of little children fulfills a divine purpose, according to Augustine. When parents experience “the suffering and death of their little ones so dear to them,” he suggests, God is disciplining the parents (“The Free Choice of the Will,” FC 59).

Calvin made a similar point when he wrote:

Suppose a man falls among thieves, or wild beasts. . . . Suppose another man wandering through the desert finds help in his straits. . . . Carnal reason ascribes all such happenings, whether prosperous or adverse, to fortune. But anyone who has been taught by Christ's lips . . . will look farther afield for a cause, and will consider that all events are governed by God's secret plan.⁷

Another classic expression of this traditional perspective came from the sixteenth-century monk Brother Lawrence, who wrote:

God knows best what we need and everything He does is for our good. If we knew how much He loves us, we would always be ready to receive from Him, without equanimity, the sweet and the bitter, and even the most painful and most difficult things would be pleasing and agreeable . . . when we believe that it is the hand of God acting on us, that it is a Father filled with love who subjects us to this humiliation, grief and suffering then all bitterness . . . is forgotten and we rejoice in them. We must believe unquestioningly that . . . it is pleasing to God to sacrifice ourselves to Him, that it is by His divine Providence that we are abandoned to all kinds of conditions, to suffer all kinds of sufferings, miseries and temptations.⁸

I call this understanding of God's relationship to the world the "blueprint worldview,"⁹ for it assumes that everything somehow fits into "God's secret plan"—a divine blueprint. The view takes many different forms, some saying, for example, that God *ordains* all things, others that he simply *allows* tragic events to occur. But each shares the assumption that, whether ordained or allowed, there is a *specific divine reason* for every occurrence in history. If God wanted to prevent the event from taking place, the reasoning goes, he could have prevented it. Since he did not, he must have had a good reason for not doing so.

Questioning the Blueprint Worldview

As traditional and popular as the blueprint worldview is, it is not without significant difficulties. For one thing, this view makes it exceedingly difficult to

⁷John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. James T. McNeill, trans. Ford L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 198-99 [1.16.2].

⁸Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. John J. Delaney (Garden City, N.Y.: Image, 1977), pp. 95-96, 100.

⁹I place an asterisk after the first use of terms or concepts that may be unfamiliar to lay readers or that are unique to the theodicy developed in this book. A short definition of the term or concept and an explanation of how it fits into the trinitarian warfare theodicy is found in the glossary.

reconcile the evil in our world with the omnipotence and perfect goodness of God. It is not easy to believe—and for some of us, not possible to believe—that there is a specific providential purpose being served by certain horrifying experiences.

For example, dozens of small children were recently buried alive by a mudslide in Mexico. Can we conceive of a specific reason why God might have deemed it better to allow this tragedy than to prevent it? To cite another example, several years ago a young girl was abducted from her own yard in a rural town in Minnesota. Her parents now live in a perpetual nightmare, wondering every day if their daughter is alive and, if she is, what is being done to her. Can we theorize a possible “good” providential reason why God might have thought it better to allow this nightmare rather than to prevent it? Is it possible to accept the advice of Augustine, Calvin and Brother Lawrence and encourage these parents to accept this nightmare as coming from their loving Father’s hand?

To some of us, the suggestion that God has a “higher reason” for allowing children to suffocate in mud or be kidnapped is insulting to those who experience the horror as well as to the character of God.¹⁰ Indeed, on the assumption that believing in God means accepting a “higher harmony” in which horrifying events somehow fit, some have abandoned belief in God altogether. Like Ivan in Dostoyevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, these people abandon belief in God on moral grounds. “I renounce the higher harmony altogether,” Ivan announces. “It’s not worth the tears of . . . one tortured child.”¹¹ Any design that intentionally includes the suffering of innocent children for a “greater purpose” is intrinsically immoral, he argues, and we are obliged to renounce it.

The Warfare Worldview

From my perspective, Ivan’s rage is justified, but his rejection of God unnecessary. For, despite the above mentioned motif stressing God’s sovereignty, Scripture does not support the view that there must be a specific divine reason behind all events. This brings us to a second and even more fundamental problem with the blueprint worldview: it is, I contend, rooted in an imbalanced reading of the Bible.

¹⁰See, e.g., Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990); and M. Scott, “The Morality of Theodicies,” *RelS* 32 (1996): 1-13.

¹¹See Walter Kaufmann, ed., *Religion from Tolstoy to Camus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), pp. 137-44.

While Scripture emphasizes God's ultimate authority over the world, it also emphasizes that agents, whom God has created, can and do resist his will. Scripture does not teach that God controls all the behavior of free agents, whether humans or angels. Humans and fallen angels are able to grieve God's Spirit and to some extent frustrate his purposes (e.g., Gen 6:6; Is 63:10; Lk 7:30; Acts 7:51; Eph 4:30; Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7). While his *general will* for world history cannot fail, his *particular will* for individuals often does. God does not will any individual to eternally perish, for example, yet multitudes of individuals thwart this will and choose this destiny for themselves (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9).

Indeed, as I shall show in chapter one, there is a dominant motif running throughout Scripture—I have elsewhere argued that it is the *central* motif of Scripture—that depicts God as warring against human and angelic opponents who are able in some measure to thwart his will.¹² While the previously mentioned biblical motif stresses that God is in control of the overall flow of world history, this other motif qualifies this truth by depicting God as *striving to establish* his will “on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10).

God genuinely strives against rebellious creatures. According to Scripture, the head of this rebellion is a powerful fallen angel named Satan. Under him are a myriad of other spiritual beings and humans who refuse to submit to God's rule. Scripture refers to this collective rebellion as a kingdom (Mt 12:26; Col 1:13; Rev 11:15). It is clear that God shall someday vanquish this rebel kingdom, but it is equally clear that in the meantime he genuinely wars against it.

This motif expresses what I call the “warfare worldview”* of the Bible. I argue that the narrative of the Bible and all events in world history are best understood against the backdrop of this worldview. The world is literally caught up in a spiritual war between God and Satan. The main difference between the warfare worldview and the blueprint worldview is that the former does not assume that there is a specific divine reason for what Satan and other evil agents do. To the contrary, God fights these opponents precisely because *their* purposes are working *against his* purposes. The reason why they do what they do is found in them, not God.

Suffering takes on a different meaning when it is viewed against the backdrop of a cosmic war, as opposed to a context that assumes everything is part of God's “secret plan.” In the warfare worldview we would not wonder about the specific reason God might have had in allowing little

¹²For a thorough analysis of this motif, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

children to be buried alive in mud or a young girl to be kidnapped. Instead, we would view these individuals as “victims of war” and assign the blame to human or demonic beings who are opposing God’s will. Following Scripture, we would of course look to God for our comfort in the midst of our suffering, trust that he is working to bring good out of the evil, and find consolation in our confidence that the war will someday come to a glorious end. But we would not look to God’s purposes for the *explanation* of why this specific evil occurred in the first place. In a warfare worldview, this is understood to be the result of the evil intentions and activity of human and angelic agents.

The Thesis of This Work

As is the case with the blueprint worldview, the warfare worldview is not without difficulties. Foremost among these is the question of how this view can be reconciled with the biblical teaching that God is the all-powerful Creator of the world. Since the warfare worldview denies that God always has a specific reason for allowing evil deeds to occur, must it not deny that God is *able* to prevent events he wishes would not take place? We may state the dilemma as follows: It seems we must either believe that God does not prevent certain events because he *chooses* not to or because he is *unable* to. The warfare worldview denies that God always chooses not to intervene, for this would require the belief that there is a specific divine purpose behind everything. Hence the warfare worldview must accept that at least sometimes God is *unable* to prevent them. But how then can we continue to affirm that God is all-powerful?

In essence, the goal of this book is to answer this question. How are we to conceive of an all-powerful God creating beings who to some degree possess the power to thwart his will, and thus against whom he must genuinely battle if he is to accomplish his will? The attempt to answer this question is the attempt to render philosophically coherent the warfare worldview of Scripture as well as the war-torn appearance of our world.

My conviction is that, unlike the questions that the blueprint worldview raises, this question has a plausible answer. The thesis of this book is that the answer lies in the nature of love. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God’s essence is love (1 Jn 4:8, 16). God created the world for the purpose of displaying his triune love and inviting others to share in it (cf. esp. Jn 17:20-25). I shall argue that it was not logically possible for God to have this objective without risking the possibility of war breaking out in his creation. By definition, I will contend, the possibility of love among contingent creatures

such as angels and humans entails the possibility of its antithesis, namely, war. If God wanted the former, he had to risk the latter.

More specifically, throughout this work I will submit and defend six theses that I believe are entailed by the conviction that God created the world to invite others to share in his triune love. If accepted, these six theses make sense of the warfare worldview of the Bible and of the war-torn nature of the world.

The Title of This Work

As should already be clear, this work is not focused exclusively on the identity and activity of Satan. I nevertheless decided to title this work *Satan and the Problem of Evil* for the following three reasons.

First, as we will see in the next chapter, the New Testament repeatedly identifies the originator and head of the rebellion against God as Satan. Indeed, although it does not locate the entire responsibility for all evil on Satan, it does trace all evil back to him. Hence, for example, the New Testament identifies illness, diseases, spiritual blindness and episodes of demonization as part of Satan's work (Lk 13:10-17; Acts 10:38; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 Jn 3:8).¹³ The war that currently ravages the creation involves all angels and humans, but it is first and foremost a struggle between Satan and God. Thus, insofar as our goal is to render this cosmic struggle intelligible and understand evil in our lives in the light of it, it made sense to express it as centered on Satan and the problem of evil.

Second, and closely related to this, because Scripture depicts Satan as being far more powerful than any of the demonic or human agents that are under him, he represents the ultimate challenge for our theodicy. The challenge of explaining how God could create beings who can resist his will and genuinely war against him is epitomized in Satan. If we can account for his existence, we shall have thereby accounted for the existence of all lesser evil agents. So again, it made sense to express the subject matter of this work as being about the connection between Satan and the problem of evil.

Third, I will argue that there is a class of evils in the world that cannot be explained adequately except by appealing to Satan. When people inflict harm on other people, we can perhaps fully account for the evil act by appealing to their free will. But how are we to account for the fact that people as well as animals suffer from "natural" causes? While appealing to

¹³Cf. *ibid.*

Satan is not itself sufficient to explain “natural” evil,* I shall argue that no explanation that ignores his activity is adequate.¹⁴

Constructing a “Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy”

I label the position I develop in this work the trinitarian warfare theodicy.* It is a *warfare* theodicy because it attempts to make philosophical sense of the warfare worldview of Scripture and to understand our own experience of evil in this framework.

I call it a *trinitarian* warfare theodicy for two reasons. First, I want clearly to distinguish the warfare worldview I espouse and defend from the warfare worldview that most other cultures in history have in some form espoused.¹⁵ The biblical warfare worldview is unique in that it has at its foundation the belief in a triune Creator God who is all-powerful and all-good. This is why the trinitarian warfare worldview* is unique: it must reconcile the reality of spiritual war with the belief in an all-powerful and all-good God.

Yet the belief in the omnipotent, triune God that leads to the problem of evil also leads to its solution, which constitutes the second reason I call this theodicy a *trinitarian* warfare theodicy. We are not talking about any omnipotent deity; we are speaking specifically of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who created the world as an expression of love and as an invitation to love. We are speaking of the Father who sent his Son to defeat the devil and rescue humans through the power of the Spirit (1 Jn 3:8; 4:7-16). I contend that if we think consistently about the loving purposes and sovereign power of *this* God, we will understand why the creation had to include the possibility of the kind of war and the type of suffering we and God are now in the midst of.

The Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy and Other Theodicies

This work is intended to be a constructive work in philosophical theology, not primarily a polemical work. While I shall at points need to establish my perspective over and against others (especially chapters two, eight and nine), space will not allow me to interact critically and in depth with the multitude of other theodicies that have been put forth. For the purpose of clarification,

¹⁴Philosophers and theologians customarily distinguish between “moral” and “natural” evil, the former being evil that results from free agents, the latter being evil that comes from “natural” causes. I ultimately deny the distinction. Hence, throughout this work I place quotation marks around the word *natural* when referring to “natural evil.” My argument is that there is in fact nothing “natural” about it. Ultimately, it is as much the result of free agents exercising their will as is “moral evil.”

¹⁵Cf. Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 11-17.

however, it may prove helpful to offer an overview of how my work generally contrasts with other approaches to the problem of evil. Three points may be made.

First, as suggested above, the trinitarian warfare theodicy contrasts with theodicies predicated on the blueprint worldview, that is, that assume there must always be a specific divine reason for each specific evil in the world. I do not deny that in the context of this war zone God *sometimes* may allow, or even ordain, suffering for a particular higher purpose. Scripture teaches this much. I can therefore affirm much in those traditional theodicies that explain suffering as, for example, God's way of punishing sin, of building our character, or of contributing to some other "greater good." However, I deny that Scripture, reason or experience requires the belief that suffering must *always* serve a divine purpose.

Second, almost all theodicies predicated on the blueprint worldview affirm the reality of human and angelic free will. The church has unanimously affirmed that the angels who fell and the humans who followed them chose to do so of their own volition and that they should not have done so. These agents are morally responsible for their misdeeds. To this extent these theodicies are compatible with the trinitarian warfare theodicy advocated in this work.

The trinitarian warfare theodicy constructed in this work differs from these theodicies, however, in its claim that agents are genuinely free only if the agents themselves are the *ultimate explanations* of their own free activity (see chapter two). If we understand the purpose an agent had in mind in freely carrying out a particular deed, we have understood the *ultimate reason* for the deed. We thus need not assume that there is also a divine reason explaining its occurrence, either as to why it was ordained or specifically allowed. Theologians who espouse some form of the blueprint worldview assign the *responsibility* for evil deeds to the agents doing them but the *ultimate reason* for why these particular evil deeds were ordained or allowed to God. I will rather argue that the ultimate reason for a deed is inextricably connected to the agent who is morally responsible for it.

Defenders of blueprint theodicies have made valiant attempts to argue that it is logically possible to affirm that agents are free and that there is a specific divine purpose behind their behavior, whether they believe this behavior is specifically ordained or specifically allowed by God. I do not believe any of these attempts have been successful, but aside from several criticisms that shall be made in chapter two, it lies outside the parameters of this work to demonstrate this. I will be content rather to offer a view that, if

accepted, renders these attempts unnecessary. That is, if we reject the assumption that there is a specific divine reason behind all free actions, attempts to demonstrate its logical possibility become superfluous.

Third, a number of philosophers and theologians in recent times have attempted to avoid the blueprint worldview by affirming that events with no divine reason behind them can happen. On a number of different grounds these thinkers affirm that gratuitous suffering (i.e., suffering that has no specific divine reason behind it) is consistent with belief in an all-powerful God.¹⁶ To this extent, these approaches are consistent with the one I develop in this book. Indeed, I make significant use of these approaches in developing my own perspective.

However, my approach differs from most of these approaches in at least two respects. First, the most fundamental reason why I believe suffering is often gratuitous—devoid of a divine reason—differs from these other approaches. Within my system the possibility of gratuitous suffering is necessarily built into the possibility of love for contingent creatures.

Second, my reading of Scripture and my approach to understanding evil in the world, especially “natural” evil, leads me to place far more emphasis on the importance of nonhuman free agents than these other approaches have typically done. To be sure, a few philosophers and theologians in recent times have suggested that we need to appeal to Satan and demonic agents to account for the full scope of evil in the world (see chapter ten). But none have yet developed this thesis fully. I shall attempt to do so in this work.

Method

The method I employ to arrive at the six theses that constitute the core of the trinitarian warfare worldview is based on Wesley’s methodological quadrangle of Scripture, reason, experience and tradition as the criteria for theological truth.¹⁷ A brief word should be said about each of these criteria.

¹⁶As shall be more clear, to say that there is no specific divine reason behind a particular evil act is not to say that God doesn’t *respond* to a particular evil act in such a way that a good purpose is brought out of it (Rom 8:28). It is worth noting that even some theologians within the Reformed tradition have moved away from the blueprint worldview. See, for example, Vincent Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Adrio König, *Here Am I: A Christian Reflection on God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Does God Suffer?” *Modern Reformation* 8 (October 1999): 45-47.

¹⁷On Wesley’s quadrangle see Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990); W. Stephen Gunter et al., *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).

First, I assume that Scripture is divinely inspired and therefore trustworthy on all matters that it intends to teach. I believe this assumption is defensible on rational and historical grounds, though it lies outside the scope of this work to demonstrate this.¹⁸ Granted, because this is a work in philosophical theology, reason will play a more dominant role than it would if this were a work in biblical theology. Still, it is my conviction that whatever we arrive at by means of reason must square with the teaching of Scripture.

Second, as was just suggested, I assume that reason, if employed correctly, is also a trustworthy guide in seeking after truth. Scriptural revelation goes *beyond* reason, but I do not believe it ever goes *against* reason. Scripture may lead us to accept *paradoxes* (such as the incarnation and the Trinity), but it never requires that we accept *contradictions*, which are devoid of meaning.

Third, I assume that experience has a legitimate role to play in our quest for truth. This assumption is rooted in the scriptural teaching that God is truthful and that we are made in his image. We are “wired,” as it were, to experience the world accurately. I thus believe that our theologizing and philosophizing should square with and illuminate the way we actually experience the world on a day-by-day basis. For example, I will argue in chapter two that the fact that we must assume we are self-determining with every decision we make is a very good reason to accept the conclusion that we are self-determining agents. Similarly, I shall argue in chapter four that, since we must assume that the future is partly open as well as partly settled with every decision we make, there is good reason for concluding that the future is in fact partly open and partly settled. Indeed, throughout this work I will suggest that the fact that the world *looks* like a war zone between good and evil is a very good reason for believing that the world *is* a war zone. Unless we have irrefutable reasons for thinking otherwise, we should accept that things are the way they appear.

We must be careful here, of course, especially in these postmodern times, when some are inclined to make experience the final arbiter of all truth claims. Although we are made in God’s image and “wired” to experience the world accurately, we are also fallen. Consequently, experience can deceive us. It should therefore never be placed above or even considered apart from Scripture and reason. But when considered in the light of Scripture and reason, I believe that experience can contribute to our search for truth.

Finally, I assume that church tradition has a dialectical role to play in our

¹⁸In my view the inspirational authority of Scripture attaches to the canonical form of Scripture and does not itself resolve any historical-critical issues regarding the editorial histories of various texts. For the purposes of this work, such issues may therefore be left aside.

quest for truth. As a Protestant I am careful to place Scripture above tradition. I hold to the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, believing that Scripture is the final arbiter of theological truth. But I nevertheless hold that all theological and philosophical reflection must be conducted in critical dialogue with church tradition. Concerning the development of the trinitarian warfare theodicy, I find that the early postapostolic church has a great deal to contribute, insights that were obscured in the tradition after Augustine (see chapters one and ten).¹⁹

These four assumptions constitute the method I employ as I work out the implications of love and thereby attempt to render the warfare worldview of Scripture intelligible. In short, I shall be reflecting on the nature of love in the light of Scripture, reason, experience and church tradition. As I seek to identify the a priori conditions that make love among contingent creatures possible, all four of these criteria will be employed simultaneously.

I do so because these four criteria provide checks and balances on one another. If our thinking about the conditions of love contradict our reading of Scripture, for example, this is a sure indication that we are either reasoning improperly or interpreting the Bible incorrectly. Similarly, if our interpretation of Scripture contradicts our experience, this also is a sure indication that we are either misinterpreting Scripture or our experience. And when aspects of the church's theological tradition come into conflict with either Scripture, reason or experience, this too is an indication that we need to question either the church's tradition or our use of these other three criteria.

Employing the four criteria simultaneously also ensures that our use of any of the criteria will not be myopic. Attending to our experience may illuminate aspects of Scripture that we might otherwise miss, for example, and thinking through the metaphysical implications of love among contingent creatures may bring to our awareness aspects of our experience, of Scripture or of the church's theological tradition that we might otherwise overlook.

Outline of My Argument

This work is structured in two parts. Part one develops the six theses that

¹⁹In a forthcoming volume (*The Myth of the Blueprint* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming]) I shall develop the thesis that the postapostolic fathers generally reflect a warfare worldview which contrasts at significant points with the blueprint worldview developed by St. Augustine. I shall trace the philosophical influences that contributed to this shift and argue that it led much of the classical-philosophical tradition in the church in an unbiblical and philosophically untenable direction.

structure the trinitarian warfare theodicy. Part two works through the implications of this theodicy in relationship to prayer, “natural” evil and the doctrine of eternal punishment.

I will develop my argument as follows: Since my entire project is an attempt to make philosophical sense of the warfare worldview of Scripture, it will be necessary first to survey the biblical material that expresses this worldview. Unless the significance of this material is adequately appreciated, my efforts to make sense of it will not be understood. This is the primary goal of chapter one (“The World at War”). I shall also take this opportunity to root my own reflections on the problem of evil in church history by briefly discussing the manner in which the trinitarian warfare theodicy was anticipated in the thinking of the early postapostolic fathers.

With this foundation in place, I will proceed to develop the six theses that form the core of my position. The first thesis of the trinitarian warfare theodicy (TWT1) is that love must be freely chosen. I shall argue that we can conceive of beings possessing the capacity to love only if we conceive of them as possessing self-determining freedom.* Correlatively, I argue that the warfare worldview of Scripture presupposes that angels and humans possess self-determining freedom. Many today argue that this concept of freedom is implausible, incoherent or theologically misguided. Chapter two (“The Free Fall”) thus spells out TWT1 and defends it against these objections.

In chapters three (“A Risky Creation”) and four (“A Question of Balance”) I develop and defend the second thesis of the trinitarian warfare theodicy. I argue that love entails risk (TWT2). God could not have created a world in which creatures possess a measure of self-determining freedom without risking some loss. His free creatures might not choose as he wants them to choose. On both theological and philosophical grounds, however, many object to the concept of a risk-taking God. I therefore set forth the biblical and philosophical case for viewing risk as a legitimate and important attribute of God. In the course of making my case I will address the implications of attributing risk to God for our understanding of God’s knowledge of, and relationship to, the future.

The next two chapters develop and defend the remaining four theses of the trinitarian warfare theodicy. In chapter five (“Love and War”) I submit the thesis that love, and thus freedom, entails that we are to some extent morally responsible for one another (TWT3). We could not have the capacity to love unless we also possessed the power to influence one another, for better or for worse. I further argue that the power to influence for the worse must be roughly proportionate to our power to influence for the better (TWT4). I

address a number of possible objections in the course of developing these two theses and conclude that accepting them renders intelligible aspects of Scripture and of our experience that are otherwise difficult to understand.

I develop the final two theses of the trinitarian warfare theodicy in chapter six (“No Turning Back”). I contend that not only does love entail freedom but that this freedom must be, within limits, irrevocable (TWT5). This thesis, if accepted, explains why God cannot always prevent evil deeds he would otherwise prevent. To some extent God places an irrevocable limitation on himself with his decision to create beings who have the capacity to love and who are therefore free. I further argue, however, that this limitation is not infinite, for our capacity to freely choose love is not endless (TWT6). Angels and humans are finite beings who thus possess only a finite capacity to embrace or thwart God’s purposes for our lives. This final thesis of the trinitarian warfare theodicy renders intelligible why God must genuinely war against rebellious creatures at the present time, though he is certain to overcome them in the future.

Having established the framework of the trinitarian warfare theodicy in part one, I spend the next six chapters (part two) applying it to various issues important for any theodicy. Chapter seven (“Praying in the Whirlwind”) addresses whether or not the trinitarian warfare theodicy makes sense of the Scripture’s teaching regarding the urgency of petitionary prayer. I argue that it does so better than any alternative.

The next three chapters address the problem of “natural” evil. This is where the centrality of Satan and his rebellious army within the trinitarian warfare theodicy is most clearly seen. I argue that ultimately there is no such thing as “natural” evil (which is why I place quotation marks around the word). In my view, *all* evil ultimately derives from the wills of free agents. What cannot be attributed to the volition of human agents should be attributed, directly or indirectly, to the volition of fallen angels.

In chapters eight (“Red in Tooth and Claw”) and nine (“When Nature Becomes a Weapon”) I review and critique seven different ways philosophers and theologians have attempted to explain “natural” evil. I attempt to show that while there are important principles found in each of these views, they are all inadequate as a comprehensive explanation for “natural” evil because they fail to recognize and emphasize the wills of spiritual agents behind the forces of nature. I then attempt to provide this missing element in chapter ten (“This an Enemy Has Done”).

Finally, arguably the most challenging aspect of the problem of evil is the reality of hell—at least as it has traditionally been conceived. If earthly suffer-

ing is hard to reconcile with an all-loving God, how much more difficult is it to reconcile the reality of hopeless eternal suffering with this understanding of God? The issue is of particular interest to us because it does not seem that the trinitarian warfare theodicy could be of any value in resolving this dilemma. Gratuitous suffering at the present time is inevitable and intelligible, I argue, because we are presently engaged in a cosmic war, and the possibility of the suffering we consequently experience was metaphysically required by the possibility of love. But what explains suffering—unending suffering—once the war has ceased? Unlike suffering in this present age, it seems that suffering in hell can only exist *because God wills it*.

The final two chapters of this book address this challenging issue. In chapter eleven (“A Clash of Doctrines”) I examine why the church has traditionally believed that hell is characterized by eternal, conscious suffering and discuss the problems involved in this view. I then examine an increasingly popular understanding of hell called annihilationism,* which avoids these problems by maintaining that unsaved people and rebellious angels are eternally extinguished, not tormented, by God after being judged for their sins. While the view has much to be said for it, however, it also has some problems of its own.

In the final chapter of this book (“A Separate Reality”) I propose an alternative model of hell that modifies both the traditional and the annihilationist models, retaining the value but avoiding the difficulties found in both. Utilizing Karl Barth’s concept of “the nothingness” (das Nichtige*) as well as insights from C. S. Lewis, I attempt to construct an internally consistent and experientially plausible model of hell that allows us to say both that those who reject God’s love suffer eternally, in one sense, and that they have been annihilated, in another sense.²⁰

The Style of This Work

Finally, a word should be said about the style of this work. As in *God at War*, the first volume in this Satan and Evil series, I have attempted to make this

²⁰I include five appendixes at the end of this work that consider issues relevant to the trinitarian warfare theodicy. Appendix one offers brief responses to objections that can be raised against this theodicy. Appendix two offers four philosophical arguments for the incompatibility of self-determining freedom and the view that the future is exhaustively definite in the mind of God. Appendix three deals with the issue of what becomes of people who never had the chance to resolve themselves for or against God’s love. Appendix four briefly develops a “theology of chance,” since chance is important to the trinitarian warfare theodicy but ruled out by most of the church tradition. Appendix five briefly addresses passages of Scripture often cited in support of compatibilism.

work as accessible to nonspecialists as possible without compromising its academic integrity. I believe that the subject matter is too important to be restricted to specialists in philosophical theology. Besides, most of what is said in highly specialized philosophical works can, with some effort, be translated into common language without much loss of meaning or precision.

I have thus attempted to balance concerns for popular communicability with concerns for academic rigor. Whenever possible, I have “tucked” technical discussions that are likely to be of interest only to specialists in the notes. Laypersons could bypass this material without losing much of the substance of this work, though it is possible that certain questions may arise for them that are only addressed in the notes.

Despite my efforts to use ordinary language as much as possible, however, lay readers should be forewarned that several sections in the body of this work required more technical jargon than the rest of the work. The middle subsection of chapter two (“A Philosophical Objection”) is the most technical section of this work. It contains a rather philosophical defense of self-determining freedom. I deemed this defense indispensable inasmuch as this conception of freedom is foundational to the central thesis of this work. Nevertheless, lay readers who already agree that humans possess self-determining freedom (i.e., who agree that compatibilism* is misguided) may want to consider this section optional and skip forward to the next subsection (“A Theological Objection”).

Beyond this, a few sections of chapters four and nine deal with philosophical issues that some may consider demanding. Sections of chapter twelve may be difficult for some as well, simply because of the heavily nuanced nature of the discussion. I encourage lay readers not to worry too much about this. This material is important, but I believe the articulation and defense of the trinitarian warfare worldview sustained throughout this work can be adequately understood even if this particular material is not.

Having said all this, and having laid out the map of how we shall proceed, we now embark on the project. Our first step is to survey the warfare worldview of the Bible and of the early postapostolic church.

PART I

I

THE WORLD AT WAR

The Warfare Worldview of the Bible & the Early Church

And war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

REVELATION 12:7-9

No one . . . who has not heard what is related of him who is called “devil,” and his “angels,” and what he was before he became a devil, and how he became such, and what was the cause of the simultaneous apostasy of those who are termed his angels, will be able to ascertain the origin of evils.

ORIGEN, *FIRST PRINCIPLES*

No theodicy that does not take the Devil fully into consideration is likely to be persuasive.

JEFFREY B. RUSSELL, *MEPHISTOPHELES*

War is the father of all and the king of all.

HERACLITUS

As noted in the introduction, this work is an attempt at making philosophical sense of the warfare worldview of the Bible. How can the scriptural depiction of God striving to accomplish his will against agents who genuinely resist it be reconciled with Scripture’s uniform testimony that God is all-powerful? The answer, I will argue, lies in the necessary conditions of

creatures possessing the capacity to love. Before exploring these conditions, however, we must first have an adequate appreciation of the biblical material that gives rise to the question.

Toward this end, I first consider various ways the Old Testament expresses a warfare worldview. I then discuss the manner in which Jesus' ministry reflects a warfare worldview, followed by an examination of how it gets reflected throughout the remainder of the New Testament. I conclude with a brief examination of the warfare mindset reflected in the writings of the postapostolic fathers. This chapter's thesis is that, as much as Scripture emphasizes God's control of the world, this pervasive warfare motif suggests that he does not control everything. One important implication of this is that one cannot posit a *specific* divine reason for the behavior of beings who resist God's will.

The Warfare Worldview of the Old Testament

In sharp contrast to the New Testament, Satan plays a minor role in the Old Testament. Instead, the warfare worldview in the Old Testament is expressed in terms of God's conflict with hostile waters, with cosmic monsters, and with other gods. We will examine these three motifs in this order.

Rebuking hostile waters. Like their ancient Near Eastern neighbors, ancient Jews believed that the earth was founded on and encircled by water (e.g., Ps 104:2-3, 5). And, as was the case with these neighbors, ancient Israelites often depicted these waters as a chaotic or hostile force. This was one of the ways ancient authors expressed the conviction that there was something that opposes God and his creation in the cosmic environment of the earth. The Creator thus had to fight to preserve the order of creation.

Whereas other cultures credited one of their chief god(s) with preserving order against hostile forces of chaos, biblical authors always acknowledge Yahweh as the earth's defender. It is Yahweh's "rebuke" (i.e., not the rebuke of a pagan god) that causes the hostile waters to "flee." It is "at the sound of [his] thunder" that "they take to flight" (Ps 104:7). Indeed, these hostile waters take flight at the very sight of God (Ps 77:16).

Moreover, it was the Lord who assigns these rebel waters a "boundary that they may not pass" (Ps 104:9, cf. Job 38:6-11; Prov 8:27-29). It is the Lord and none other who defeats these enemies, who tramples on the sea with his warring horses (Hab 3:15), and who sits enthroned above "the mighty waters" (Ps 29:3-4, 10).

In sum, as Jon Levenson notes, the view here is that "the Sea [is] a some-

what sinister force that, left to its own, would submerge the world and forestall the ordered reality we call creation. What prevents this frightening possibility is the mastery of YHWH, whose blast and thunder . . . force the Sea into its proper place.”¹

Biblical authors are of course confident that the Lord is capable of containing, and ultimately defeating, these rebel waters. But there is no suggestion here that Yahweh’s war against these forces is prescribed or inauthentic. To the contrary, as a number of exegetes have noted, biblical authors exalt God’s sovereignty precisely *because* they are certain that these raging forces are real, formidable foes.²

Leviathan and Rahab. Another common ancient Israelite way of expressing the Creator’s warfare against anticreational forces was to depict them as cosmic monsters. Here too the Jews share much in common with the mythology of their Near Eastern neighbors. The two most frequently mentioned “monsters” in the Old Testament are Leviathan and Rahab.

As in Canaanite mythology, Leviathan was believed to be a ferocious, twisting serpent of the sea encircling the earth. He had (on some accounts) many heads (Ps 74:14) and could blow smoke out of his nose(s) and fire out of his mouth(s) (Job 41:18-21). Humans could not defeat or control this beast, for human weapons were useless against a creature of such power. Indeed, this monster could eat iron like straw and crush bronze as if it were decayed timber (Job 41:26-27).

Nevertheless, biblical authors were confident that Leviathan was no match for Yahweh. At the time of creation as well as in subsequent battles against Israel’s enemies, Yahweh “broke the heads of the dragons in the waters [and] crushed the heads of Leviathan” (Ps 74:13-14). Looking forward to God’s ultimate victory wherein all of creation would be freed from evil, Isaiah writes: “On that day the LORD with his cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twist-

¹Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 22.

²Levenson, *Persistence of Evil*; John Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979); Adrio König, *Here Am I! A Christian Reflection on God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982); Adrio König, *New and Greater Things: Re-evaluating the Biblical Message on Creation* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1988); C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament*, POS 5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966); Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995); T. N. D. Mettinger, “Fighting the Powers of Chaos and Hell—Towards the Biblical Portrait of God,” *ST 39* (1985): 21-38.

ing serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea” (Is 27:1).³

Given the mythical-poetic nature of this literature, we should not suppose any contradiction between the claim that Leviathan’s heads *were* crushed in the primordial past and the claim that someday Yahweh *will* kill this dragon. The point of such passages is that the Creator *has had* and *will continue to have* strong opposition from cosmic forces and that he has been able and will continue to be able to contain, and ultimately defeat, these forces.

Rahab is portrayed in similar terms. This cosmic creature inhabiting the waters that encircle the earth threatened the whole earth but was no match for Yahweh. When Yahweh expressed his wrath against evil, “the helpers of Rahab bowed beneath him” (Job 9:13). In the primordial past Yahweh’s power “churned up the sea,” his wisdom “cut Rahab to pieces,” and his hand “pierced the gliding serpent” (Job 26:12-13 NIV). The psalmist also celebrated Yahweh’s sovereignty over “the raging of the sea” by announcing that he had “crushed Rahab like a carcass” and “scattered [his] enemies with [his] mighty arm” (Ps 89:9-10). In similar fashion Isaiah reassured himself that Yahweh would “awake” to deliver Israel by remembering that in the primal past he had “cut Rahab in pieces” and “pierced the dragon” (Is 51:9).

Contrary to the convictions of most contemporary Western people, but in keeping with the basic assumptions of ancient people and primordial people groups today, Old Testament authors did not draw a sharp distinction between “spiritual” and “physical” realities. The world “above” and the world “below” were seen as intertwined. Hence biblical authors frequently see battles between nations as participating in God’s ongoing battle with cosmic forces. For example, the evil character and threatening power of Rahab on a cosmic level was understood to be revealed in and channeled through the evil character and threatening power of Egypt (Ps 87:4; Is 30:7; cf. Jer. 51:34; Ezek 29:3; 32:2).

For this reason, Israel’s defeat of an opponent was sometimes construed as the Lord once again defeating cosmic forces of chaos (Is 17:12-14). When Yahweh freed the children of Israel from Egypt, for example, this was considered his defeat of the raging waters (Hab 3:12-13; cf. Nahum 1:4).⁴ And when he further delivered Israel by parting the Red Sea, this was seen as a

³The same vision of Leviathan and his ultimate defeat is expressed in Revelation 12, which speaks of the “great red dragon, with seven heads,” who is “the deceiver of the whole world.” This “great dragon” is explicitly identified as “the Devil and Satan” (Rev 12:3, 9).

⁴A. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, HDR 9 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 11.

new application of Yahweh's victory over Rahab (Ps 77:16; Is 51:9-10).⁵

Conversely, Israel's defeat by an enemy could be described as being devoured by the mighty sea serpent (Jer 51:34, cf. v. 55). Similarly, David identified the enemies who opposed him with the forces that have opposed God since the beginning of creation (Ps 93:3-4). Moreover, when David's life was threatened he asked the Lord to reenact his primordial victory over sinister cosmic forces on his behalf. He called on Yahweh to deliver him "from my enemies and from the deep waters. Do not let the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up" (Ps 69:14-15). Again he asks, "Stretch out your hand . . . set me free and rescue me from the mighty waters, from the hand of aliens" (144:7).

As before, biblical authors were confident of the Lord's ultimate sovereignty over his cosmic foes and thus over their earthly foes. But biblical authors also assumed that the Lord nevertheless entered into genuine battle against his foes, just as they assumed that they must enter into genuine battle against their foes.

Battle among the "gods." Beyond cosmic waters and monsters, Old Testament authors also assumed the existence of multitudes of other powerful heavenly beings called "gods," the "sons of God" or, less frequently, "angels."⁶ Together they formed a "heavenly council" in which decisions affecting humans were made (1 Kings 22:20; Job 1:6; 2:1; Ps 82:1; 89:7). They were supposed to carry out God's will and fight on God's behalf (2 Sam 5:23-24; 2 Kings 2:11; 6:16-17; Ps 34:7; 68:17; 82:1-8; 103:20; Dan 7:10). For our purposes, the most significant aspect of these gods, however, is that they were considered personal agents who exercised a significant influence on the flow of history and who did not necessarily carry out Yahweh's will. Because they were personal agents, they could choose to oppose God's will—and sometimes they did.

For example, in opposition to God's will, some of these "sons of God" copulated with human women and produced hybrid giants in the days prior to the flood (Gen 6:1-4).⁷ The author(s) of Genesis provided this account in part to explain why the Lord started over with the human race at this point. Similarly, a "prince of Persia" opposed God's will by delaying his response to one of Daniel's prayers (Dan 10). The Lord had to dispatch another powerful angel to battle this "prince" in order to get the message through.

⁵Ibid., p. 117. See also Levenson, *Persistence of Evil*, pp. 20-21.

⁶Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), pp. 114-42.

⁷Ibid., pp. 176-77.

Along similar lines, a national god named Chemosh was apparently able to rout Israel on behalf of the Moabites when the king of Moab sacrificed his son to him (2 Kings 3:21-27).⁸ Indeed, a case can be made that all the “gods of the nations” were originally servants of God assigned to care for particular nations. But instead of using their position to lead the nation to Yahweh, they made themselves the object of the nation’s allegiance.⁹

Perhaps the most disclosive passage reflecting both the personal nature of these beings as well as their significant influence over what transpires on earth is Psalm 82. Here we find the psalmist proclaiming:

God has taken his place in the divine council;
 in the midst of the gods he holds judgment:
 “How long will you judge unjustly
 and show partiality to the wicked?
 Give justice to the weak and the orphan;
 maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute.
 Rescue the weak and the needy;
 deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” . . .

I say, “You are gods,
 children of the Most High, all of you;
 nevertheless, you shall die like mortals,
 and fall like any prince.” (Ps 82:1-4, 6-8)

This passage depicts a discussion that transpired in the heavenly council. These gods (perhaps national gods) had apparently been given various duties to perform among humans: to help administer justice, to defend the weak, and to help the poor. But at least some of these gods had rebelled and decided to serve the wicked instead. Consequently, Yahweh threatened them with the same fate that befalls mortals and earthly princes. Though they were truly gods, if they did not conform to God’s will, they would die like the mortals they were supposed to protect.¹⁰

The point is that Old Testament authors did not assume that things always went as God planned in the heavenly realm any more than they always

⁸Cf. Judg 11:24, which seems to assume that Chemosh was able to acquire land for the Moabites through battle.

⁹On angelic beings as “gods of the nations,” see Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 135-40. For further discussions, see Daniel I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, ETSMS 2 (Jackson, Miss.: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988); Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces That Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 87-107.

¹⁰On Yahweh’s interaction and conflict with other “gods,” see Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 114-42.

went as he planned on earth. While the Lord always accomplishes his general will in the end, there is often significant opposition along the way. His sovereignty, in other words, is a sovereignty that has to be defended.

Warfare in the Ministry of Jesus

The theme of God striving to establish his sovereign will (his kingdom) on earth over and against forces that oppose him becomes far more pronounced in the New Testament. In keeping with the apocalyptic climate of the time, we read much more about angels at war with God and other angels, about demons that torment people and, most importantly, about the powerful being who leads this rebellion against the Creator. His name, of course, is Satan.

Jesus' view of the satanic kingdom. A theme that underlies Jesus' entire ministry is the apocalyptic assumption (already intimated in the Old Testament, as we have seen) that creation has been seized by a cosmic force and that God is now battling this force to rescue it. Jesus understood himself to be the one in whom this battle was to be played out in a decisive way. The assumption is evident in almost everything Jesus says and does.

Jesus refers to Satan as "the prince" (*archōn*) of this present age three times (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The term *archōn* was used in secular contexts to denote the highest official in a city or region.¹¹ In short, Jesus acknowledges that Satan is the highest power of this present fallen world, at least in terms of his present influence. When Satan offers Jesus all "authority" over "all the kingdoms of the world," Jesus does not dispute his claim that it was his to offer (Lk 4:5-6). Other writings explicitly teach that the whole world is "under the power of the evil one" (1 Jn 5:19), for Satan is "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4) and "the ruler of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2).

Jesus addresses this evil "prince" as the leader of a relatively unified and pervasive army of spiritual powers and demons. Satan is thus called "the ruler of the demons" (Mt 9:34), and fallen angels are called "his angels" (Mt 25:41). On the basis of this assumed military unity, Jesus refutes the Pharisees' contention that he exorcises demons by the power of Satan rather than the power of God. If this were so, Jesus argues, Satan's kingdom would be working against itself (Mk 3:24) and could not exhibit the power it exhibits in this world.

Correlatively, Jesus taught that those who wish to make headway in tear-

¹¹Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul's Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 81. See the discussion in Boyd, *God at War*, p. 181.

ing down this evil kingdom and in taking back the “property” of this kingdom must first tie up “the strong man” who oversees the whole operation (Mk 3:27). This could only be done when “one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him” and thus “takes away his armor in which he trusted” (Lk 11:22). This, in a nutshell, is what Jesus understood himself to be doing by his teachings, healings, exorcisms and especially by his death and resurrection. His whole ministry was about overpowering the “fully armed” strong man who guarded “his property” (Lk 11:21)—the earth and its inhabitants who rightfully belong to God.

Demonstrating the kingdom of God. Jesus tied up the strong man so that he (and later, his church) could pillage the strong man’s kingdom. In fact, this is what Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God is all about. In the context of Jesus’ ministry, it is a warfare concept. “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons,” Jesus teaches, “then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Lk 11:20). Where God reigns, Satan and his demons cannot. Put otherwise, if the earth is to become the domain in which God is king (the kingdom of God), then it must cease being the domain in which Satan is king. This is what Jesus came to accomplish. He came to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8; cf. Heb 2:14) and to establish God’s domain on earth.

Every exorcism and every healing—the two activities that most characterize Jesus’ ministry—marked an advance toward establishing the kingdom of God over and against the kingdom of Satan.¹² Consequently, in contrast with any view that would suggest that disease and demonization somehow serve a divine purpose, Jesus *never* treated such phenomenon as anything other than the work of the enemy. He consistently treated diseased and demonized people as casualties of war. Furthermore, rather than accepting their circumstances as mysteriously fitting into God’s sovereign plan, Jesus revolted against them as something that God did not will and something that ought to be vanquished by God’s power.

¹²Susan Garrett writes, “Every healing, exorcism, or raising of the dead is a loss for Satan and a gain for God” (*The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], p. 55). James Kallas also captures the motif well when he notes that “the arrival of the kingdom is simultaneous with, dependent upon, and manifested in the routing of demons” (*The Significance of the Synoptic Miracles* [Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury, 1961], p. 78). See also O. Böcher, *Christus Exorcista: Dämonismus und Taufe im Neuen Testament*, BWANT 5.16 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972); L. Sabourin, “The Miracles of Jesus (II): Jesus and the Evil Powers,” *BTB* 4 (1974): 115-75; Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus*, WUNT 2.54 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1993), pp. 217-24; Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, WUNT 2.88 (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1997), pp. 137-82.

When confronted with a woman who had a deformed back, for example, Jesus did not wonder why God had allowed this to happen. Rather, he immediately diagnosed her as being bound by Satan and freed her from this bondage (Lk 13:11-16). Indeed, many times Jesus diagnosed illnesses as being directly caused by demons, as when he cast out demons of muteness or deafness (Mk 9:25; Lk 11:14). In other cases no exorcism was performed, but Jesus nevertheless opposed the illness as something that was not part of God's kingdom. He assumed that it was at least the indirect result of Satan's pervasive influence in the world. Hence Peter later summarized Jesus' healing ministry by noting that he "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). All sickness and disease was considered a form of satanic oppression, and so in freeing people from it Jesus demonstrated the presence of the kingdom of God.

It is curious that the evil one to whom the Bible directly or indirectly attributes all evil has played a rather insignificant role in the theodicy of the church after Augustine. This, I contend, is directly connected to the fact that the church generally accepted the blueprint worldview that Augustine espoused. If we assume that there is a specific divine reason for every particular event that transpires, including the activity of Satan, then the *ultimate* explanation for evil cannot be found in Satan. It must rather be found in the reason that God had for ordaining or allowing him to carry out his specific activity.¹³ The New Testament, I submit, does not share this assumption.

Warfare in the New Testament Church

Jesus' entire ministry, we have seen, reflects the belief that the world had been seized by a hostile, sinister lord. Jesus had come to take it back. Contrary to any view suggesting that everything has a divine purpose behind it, Jesus' ministry indicated that God's purposes for the world had to be fought for and won. Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God's will *would be* done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). This presupposes that, to a signifi-

¹³David Griffin summarizes the point well when he notes, "It has been a widespread conviction of Christians generally and theologians in particular that, in spite of appearances to the contrary, God is actually in complete control of all events. The New Testament, however, knew better" ("Why Demonic Power Exists: Understanding the Church's Enemy," *LTQ* 28 [1993]: 224). Against classical theodicies, atheist Michael Martin insightfully comments, "That things appear to us to be a certain way is itself justification for thinking things are this way" (*Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990], 339). The trinitarian warfare theodicy in principle agrees with Martin against classical theodicies. The world looks like it is not meticulously controlled by God because its not meticulously controlled by God. Indeed, the world *looks* like a battlefield between good and evil because the world *is* a battlefield between good and evil.

cant extent at least, God's will is *not now* being done on earth.

According to the New Testament, Jesus in principle defeated Satan and established God's kingdom. Through his ministry of exorcism and healing, and especially through his death and resurrection, he destroyed the power of the devil (1 Jn 3:8; Heb 2:14), disarmed the principalities and powers (Col 2:14-15), and put all God's enemies under his feet (Eph 1:22; Heb 1:13). But the New Testament does not on this account conclude that Satan has ceased being in control of this world. This is the paradox of the already-not yet tension* within the New Testament.¹⁴ While Satan has *in principle* been defeated by Christ, God's victory has not yet been fully *realized* on the earth. Applying this victory to the rest of the world is the primary business of the church, the body of Christ.

As was the case with Jesus' ministry, and as has always been the case with God's good purposes for the world, the church's efforts to apply God's victory to the world invariably encounters strong opposition from the enemy. Though they believed him to be mortally wounded, New Testament authors never underestimated the power and craftiness of this foe.

Consequently, New Testament authors refer to Satan, demons, fallen angels and various levels of evil principalities and powers as being quite active in the world (Eph 1:21; 3:10; Col 1:16). In addition, exorcism and healing continued to play an important role in the ministry of the early church (Acts 3:1-10; 8:6-7, 13; 14:3, 8-10; 19:11-12; 28:5). The world was conceived of as being in bondage to the evil one (Gal 1:4; Eph 5:16; 1 Jn 5:19). In the thinking of these New Testament writers, Satan's influence continued to be so pervasive that putting someone outside the church as a disciplinary measure was tantamount to turning that one over to Satan (1 Cor 5:1-5; 1 Tim 1:20; cf. 1 Tim 5:15).

The New Testament authors also portrayed the devil as "a roaring lion" who "prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). He was regarded as "the tempter" who influences people to sin (1 Thess 3:5; cf. Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; 2 Cor 11:3) and the deceiver who blinds the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor 4:4). Satan and his legions were understood to be behind all types of false teaching (Gal 4:8-10; Col 2:8; 1 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Jn 4:1-2; 2 Jn 7). He could appear as an "angel of light" (2 Cor 11:14) and even perform "lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for

¹⁴On the already-not yet tension in New Testament eschatology, see Werner G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus*, 3rd ed., SBT 1.23 (London: SCM Press, 1957); George E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*, 2nd ed. (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1964); B. Wiebe, "The Focus of Jesus' Eschatology," in *Self-Definition and Self-Discovery in Early Christianity: A Study in Changing Horizons*, ed. David J. Hawkins and Tom Robinson (Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen, 1990), pp. 121-46.

those who are perishing” (2 Thess 2:9-10).

Paul understood that Satan, because of his ongoing power and in spite of his mortal wound, was able to hinder the work of the church, as when he prevented Paul from preaching at Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:18). Satan discourages Christians and entraps church leaders (1 Thess 3:5; 1 Tim 3:7). He establishes strongholds of deception in the minds of believers, which Christians must war against (2 Cor 10:3-5). For this reason Paul warns us that warriors of God must never be “ignorant of [Satan’s] designs” (2 Cor 2:11). Indeed, Paul summarizes the Christian life as a battle “against the cosmic powers of this present darkness” (Eph 6:12; cf. vv. 10-18).

In sum, the world of the New Testament authors was a world at war. Granted, they expressed great confidence that Jesus had in principle defeated Satan and that Satan and all who followed him would eventually be defeated when Christ is enthroned as Lord of the cosmos. But they were just as certain that in this present fallen world order *God does not always get his way*. He desires all to be saved, for example, but many will perish (1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Pet 3:9). Similarly, God wants believers to be conformed to the image of Christ, but our minds and behavior are usually to some degree conformed to the pattern of the world and under demonic strongholds (Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 10:3-5). God’s Spirit can be, and frequently is, resisted by our wills (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). Clearly, the Lord and his church continue to face strong opposition in carrying out God’s will as we seek to establish his kingdom on the earth.

The Warfare Worldview of the Postapostolic Church

The warfare worldview of the Bible was adopted and even expanded by the first generation of believers who succeeded the apostles. Their reflections on evil differ significantly from the theology of the post-Augustinian church. They generally assume that the *final explanation* for evil is to be found in the free wills of Satan, fallen angels and human beings, as opposed to concluding that every particular evil has a divine purpose behind it.

A mediated providence. While the postapostolic fathers unequivocally affirmed that God is sovereign over the world, they also believed that his providential control was mediated by angels who possessed free will. Justin Martyr summarizes the prevailing view:

God, when He had made the whole world, and subjected things early to man . . . committed the care of men and of all things under heaven to angels whom He appointed over them. But the angels transgressed this appointment.¹⁵

¹⁵Justin Martyr 2 *Apology* 5 (ANF 1:190).

Along the same lines, Athenagoras notes that the “office of the angels is to exercise providence for God over the things created and ordered by Him.” In his view, then, God exercises a “universal and general providence of the whole,” but the control of “the particular parts are provided for by the angels appointed over them.”¹⁶ Likewise, Origen argues that every particular aspect of the earth, from the growing of fruit to the flow of streams and the purity of the air, are under “the agency and control of certain beings whom we may call invisible husbandmen and guardians.”¹⁷

For these authors everything within the physical creation is under the mediated authority of some divinely appointed spiritual agent. While sovereignly ruling the creation in a “universal and general” sense, God does not ordinarily micromanage the affairs of creation.

Angels as free moral agents. Unfortunately, as Justin noted above, some of “the angels transgressed this appointment.” These divinely appointed administrators were free moral agents who could, and to some extent did, rebel against the divine order. Pre-Augustinian writers stress the freedom and moral responsibility of both angels and humans as the ultimate explanation for their rebellious behavior.¹⁸ Athenagoras expresses this consensus

¹⁶Athenagoras *A Plea for the Christians* 24 (ANF 2:142).

¹⁷Origen *Against Celsus* 8.31 (ANF 4:650-51). On angels in charge of foundational elements, see Origen *Homily on Jeremiah* 10.6; cf. *Homilies on Luke* 12, 13. According to Origen, every angel and human being was assigned a realm of authority in creation on the basis of the virtue and/or vice displayed in a preexistent state. He writes, “in the case [or, perhaps better translated, ‘in the position’] of every creature it is a result of his own works and movements. . . . [T]hose [angelic] powers which appear either to hold sway over others or to exercise power or dominion, have been preferred to and placed over those whom they are said to govern or exercise power over . . . not in consequence of a peculiar privilege inherent in their constitutions, but on account of merit” (*First Principles* 1.5.3 [ANF 4:258]; cf. 2.9.2-4, 6).

¹⁸So, for example, Clement of Alexandria says, “This was the law from the first, that virtue should be the object of voluntary choice” (*Stromata* 7.2 [ANF 2:525]). The theme recurs among all the apologists, especially in Clement and Origen. See, for example, Clement *Stromata* 1.17; 2.3; 2.6; 2.15; 4.12; 4.22; 6.12; 7.2; Origen *On Prayer* 6.1-3; Origen *First Principles*, preface, 1.5.3; 1.8; 2.9.2; 3.1.3; 3.1.6; 3.1.18-22; Justin *1 Apology* 58; Theophilus *To Autolycus* 27; Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.37. Tatian goes so far as to say that it was “the demons . . . who laid down the doctrine of Fate” (*Address of Tatian* 9 [ANF 2:68]; see also chapters 8 and 11 of this work). Tatian has in mind here specifically the form of fatalism that was attached to the motions of planets, a view common in his day. On Tatian’s and other early apologists’ association of astrology with demonology, see Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, ed. and trans. John A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), pp. 431-33. Justin also suggested that the doctrine of fate is of demonic origin (*1 Apology* 14). On this see the discussion in Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 132-33. On the emphatic role that freedom played among all pre-Augustinian fathers, see D. Stoffer, “The Problem of Evil: An Historical Theological Approach,” *ATJ* 24 (1992): 60-62; and especially Roger Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1973), pp. 243-57.

well: “Just as with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice, so is it among the angels.” He continues:

Some free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which He had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them.¹⁹

Because they were free, they could rebel, and for Athenagoras and other early fathers, this is the ultimate explanation for why creation now exists in a war-torn condition.

Tatian argues along similar lines. He stresses the all-important role of freedom within God’s creation:

The Logos . . . before the creation of men, was the Framer of angels. And each of these two orders of creatures was made free to act as it pleased, not having the nature of good, which again is with God alone, but is brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice, in order that the bad man may be justly punished . . . but the just man be deservedly praised. . . . Such is the constitution of things in reference to angels and men.²⁰

Unlike God, who alone possesses goodness as an inherent quality, contingent beings such as angels and humans must bring it “to perfection . . . through their freedom of choice.” Moral virtue, in other words, cannot be built into contingent beings as a matter of necessity. For Tatian, this freedom explains why things have gone wrong in creation.

When men attached themselves to one who was more subtle than the rest [Satan, referring to Gen 3:1], having regard to his being the first-born, and declared him to be God, though he was resisting the law of God, then the power of the Logos excluded the beginner of the folly and his adherents from all fellowship with Himself. And so he who was made in the likeness of God [humans] . . . becomes mortal; but that first-begotten one through his transgression and ignorance becomes a demon; and they who imitated him . . . are become a host of demons, and through their freedom of choice have been given up to their own infatuation.²¹

¹⁹Athenagoras *A Plea for the Christians* 24 (ANF 2:142).

²⁰Tatian *Address to the Greeks* 7 (ANF 2:67).

²¹*Ibid.*, 2:68. On the freedom of Satan, Irenaeus writes that “he apostatized from God of his own free-will” (*Against Heresies* 5.26.2 [ANF 1:555]), and Clement says, “Now the devil, being possessed of free-will, was able both to repent and to steal.” From this he concludes, “So in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins . . . punishments are rightly inflicted” (*Stromata* 1.17 [ANF 2:319]). Likewise Origen says that, “every Rational creature . . . is capable of earning praise and censure. . . . And this also is to be held as applying to the devil himself, and those who are with him, and are called his

Tatian's references to Satan being God's "first-born," to Satan being "more subtle" than humans, and to humans making Satan their "God" give us some idea of the remarkable authority and sinister nature he believed this fallen angel to have. When Satan rebelled of his own free will, multitudes of angels chose to follow him, thereby becoming demons. Consequently, according to Tatian, the earth is now under the power of Satan and is populated by multitudes of demons.²² Indeed, Tatian elsewhere states that human life is life in slavery to ten thousand demonic tyrants.²³ Such was the common view of the early church.

For Tatian, the tragic nature of the world in its present condition is the result of angels and humans misusing their free will. The reason God gave them free will was because they, being contingent beings, could not possess "the nature of good" as a matter of necessity. If moral virtue was the goal, freedom had to be the means. Hence, evil as a possibility is built into the possibility of moral virtue.

Irenaeus provides yet another example of this postapostolic emphasis on the freedom and authority of angels. After reiterating the pre-Augustinian view of divine sovereignty by saying "there is no coercion with God, but a good will is present with Him continually," he continues:

And in man, as well as in angels, [God] has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good . . . but [they] poured contempt upon His super-eminent goodness.²⁴

For Irenaeus, God's providential will is unequivocally and unambiguously good. There is no "mystery" as to how God's goodness might lie behind children being buried in mudslides or kidnapped. In his view, this goodness is reflected in the fact that God gave humans and angels the gift of freedom. But for Irenaeus this bestowal involves an element

angels" (*First Principles* 1.5.2 [ANF 4:256]; see also 1.8.3 [ANF 4:265-66]).

²²See esp. *Address to the Greeks*, chs. 7-14, for Tatian's preoccupation with demons. See Pagels, *Origin of Satan*, pp. 131-35.

²³Tatian *Address to the Greeks* 28.

²⁴Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 5.37 (ANF 1:518). See also *Epistle to Diognetus* 7.4, which states that God sent his Son "as one who saves by persuasion, not compulsion, for compulsion is no attribute of God" (*The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings*, ed. and trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, ed. and rev. by M. W. Holmes (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992), p. 545).

of risk. It means that “rational beings” have the capacity either to go along with God’s providential design or not. For Irenaeus, this risk did not in any way compromise God’s sovereignty, for neither Irenaeus nor any other pre-Augustinian theologian defined God’s sovereignty merely in terms of control. Many of these early authors argue explicitly against this notion.²⁵ Thus with perfect consistency Irenaeus and other post-apostolic fathers affirm that the Creator is omnipotent even though he does not always get his way. Things go wrong, sometimes very wrong, and when they do these early fathers do not look for a divine reason to explain it.²⁶

God’s moral rule. This understanding of sovereignty and free will is articulated clearly in Origen. In response to the pagan claim that “whatever happens in the universe, whether it be the work of God, of angels, [or] of other demons . . . is regulated by the law of the Most High God,” Origen argues:

This is . . . incorrect; for we cannot say that transgressors follow the law of God when they transgress; and Scripture declares that it is not only wicked men who are transgressors, but also wicked demons and wicked angels. . . . When we say that “the providence of God regulates all things,” we utter a great truth if we attribute to that providence nothing but what is just and right. But if we ascribe to the providence of God all things whatsoever, however unjust they

²⁵For example, Tertullian maintains that “it is not the part of good and solid faith to refer all things to the will of God . . . as to make us fail to understand that there is a something in our power” (*Exhortation on Chastity* 2 [ANF 4:50-51]).

²⁶These early theologians take it for granted that evil arises solely from creaturely free wills and thus cannot be understood as in any sense designed by God. If it were so designed, God would be responsible for it. Origen, for example, says that it “certainly is absurd [to say] that the cause of their [fallen angels’] wickedness should be removed from the purpose of their own will and ascribed of necessity to their Creator” (*First Principles* 1.5.3 [ANF 4:258]). Tatian argues in a similar fashion when he says that “our free-will has destroyed us. . . . Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness” (*Address to the Greeks* [ANF 2:70]). Cf. Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 17, for a similar statement. As noted before, Clement of Alexandria writes, “So in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins . . . punishments are rightly inflicted” (*Stromata* 1.17 [ANF 2:319]). Similarly, Irenaeus argues that “in man, as well as in angels, [God] has placed the power of choice. [For] if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made” (*Against Heresies* 4.37 [ANF 1:518-19]). All therefore agree that, as Clement puts it, God “is in no respect whatever the cause of evil” (*Stromata* 7.3 [ANF 2:526]) and that God’s providential rule involves granting creatures freedom of choice. This thinking is far removed from Augustine’s later doctrine of predestination and his understanding of evil as always mysteriously fulfilling a positive divine role.

may be, then it is no longer true that the providence of God regulates all things.²⁷

The point is that the law of God's providence is a moral law, not a deterministic law. To say that "God regulates all things" is not to say that "God controls all things." Rather, God's governance is one that is consistent with "the preservation of freedom of will in all rational creatures."²⁸ Hence, God's sovereign will "regulates all things" not by controlling events but by imposing a moral law on them, such as the law that sin has consequences. If God's sovereignty in fact included sin, Origen argues, then it would no longer be a rule by moral law; that is, it would no longer be true that the "providence of God [morally defined] regulates all things." This line of thought is very close to Athenagoras's view, alluded to above, that God's providence is "general and universal," not meticulous. It is antithetical, however, to the blueprint model of providence that came to dominate the church's theologizing after Augustine.

Fallen angels and the problem of evil. We have seen that for the authors of this period the ultimate explanation for evil was located in the free will of creatures, not in any mysterious purposes of God. To be sure, all these fathers agree that God gave these creatures their freedom. But insofar as they address the topic, they also agree that God is not responsible for the fact that this freedom gives creatures the power to resist his will, if they so choose. As Tatian argued, the possibility of abusing freedom had to exist in order for the possibility of using it correctly to exist. When creatures abuse their God-given freedom to oppose God, the ultimate reason for their misdeed is found in them, not in God who gave them the gift they now abuse.

²⁷Origen *Against Celsus* 7.68 (ANF 4:638). Cf. *Commentary on John* 2.7 (ANF 10:330-31), where Origen attempts to reconcile Jn 1:3, which affirms that the Word made all things, with the truth that God never creates evil. His answer, in a nutshell, is that God created the devil insofar as the devil has being but not insofar as the devil has made himself the devil. "It is," he says, "as if we should say that a murderer is not a work of God, while we may say that in respect he is a man, God made him." He combines this insight with a platonic understanding of evil as privation and thus concludes that "all . . . who have part in Him [God] who is . . . may properly be called Beings; those who have given up their being, by depriving themselves of Being, have become Not-beings. . . . Thus we have shown . . . what are the 'all things' which were made through the Logos, and what came into existence without Him, since at no time is it Being, and it is, therefore, called 'Nothing.'" This conclusion anticipates both Augustine and, even more markedly, Barth. In chapters nine and twelve of this work I will argue that this definition of evil is defective as an ontological analysis of evil but not as an eschatological analysis of evil.

²⁸Origen *First Principles* 3.5.8 (ANF 4:344), in speaking about God's governance in restoring all creatures.

This perspective significantly influenced the way these early fathers addressed the problem of evil. Justin Martyr brings out this significance as clearly as anyone. After repeating the common theme that God appointed angels as morally responsible agents in charge of administering segments of his cosmos, he declares:

But the angels transgressed this appointment. . . . They afterwards subdued the human race to themselves . . . and among men they sowed murders, wars, adulteries, intemperate deeds, and all wickedness. Whence also the poets and mythologists, not knowing that it was the angels and those demons who . . . did these things . . . ascribed them to God himself, and to those who were accounted to be his very offspring.²⁹

This passage is significant for a number of reasons, not least of which is the fact that Justin is in this context expressly giving his explanation for the problem of evil raised by various opponents. The specific objection he addresses is the issue of how Christians can claim that God is “our helper” when, in fact, they are being viciously “oppressed and persecuted.”³⁰ Reflecting the warfare worldview of the New Testament, Justin’s answer is that this persecution is to be expected, for the world has been besieged by fallen angels and demons. The reason these angels fell and besieged the earth is to be found in their own free decisions. Pagan “poets and mythologists” do not understand this, however, and so mistakenly attribute “all wickedness” that fallen angels and demons perform to “God himself.”

Origen argues along similar lines. Not only does Origen agree with Justin that persecutions are demonically inspired, he develops the general understanding of the relationship between the freedom of authoritative angels and evil in the world to the furthest extent found in the early church.³¹ In discussing the problem of evil and, more specifically, while explaining why the

²⁹Justin Martyr *2 Apology* 5 (ANF 1:190). Justin is here tapping into a version of the “Watcher Tradition.” See *The Book of Enoch*, trans. Matthew Black (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), pp. 132, 161, who argues that Justin is here largely following *1 Enoch* 9:9 and 19:1, though he omits all talk about the Nephilim. In Justin’s account, demons are the children, not the grandchildren, of the hybrid marriages of humans with fallen angels. See also Everett Ferguson, *Demonology of the Early Christian World* (New York: Mellen, 1984), pp. 105-11. For an overview of the Watcher Tradition, see Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 176-77. For helpful introductions to the demonology of the early church, see Ferguson, *Demonology*; Jeffrey B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981); Leo Jung, *Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan Literature* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1926; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1995), pp. 73-86.

³⁰Justin Martyr *2 Apology* 5 (ANF 1:190).

³¹On persecutions, see Origen *Against Celsus* 1.43. See also Pagels, *Origin of Satan*, pp. 143-46.

problem has been unsolvable to pagan philosophers, Origen writes:

No one . . . who has not heard what is related of him who is called “devil,” and his “angels,” and what he was before he became a devil, and how he became such, and what was the cause of the simultaneous apostasy of those who are termed his angels, will be able to ascertain the origin of evils. But he who would attain to this knowledge must learn more accurately the nature of demons, and know that they are not the work of God so far as respects their demoniacal nature, but only in so far as they are possessed of reason; and also what their origin was, so that they became beings of such a nature, that while converted into demons, the powers of their mind remain.³²

If Satan and demons are evil, Origen suggests, it is not because God created them that way. They made themselves that way by the God-given power of their own volition. Then, most significantly, against the Gnostic understanding that matter is evil Origen adds:

Evils do not proceed from God. . . . But to maintain that matter . . . is the cause of evils, is in our opinion not true. For it is the mind of each individual which is the cause of the evil which arises in him, and this is evil . . . while the actions which proceed from it are wicked, and there is, to speak with accuracy, nothing else in our view that is evil.³³

For Origen, the key to understanding evil in the world is found in a biblical understanding of the origin of Satan and demons. “No one . . . who has not heard what is related of him who is called ‘devil,’ and his ‘angels’ . . . will be able to ascertain the origin of evils.” The crucial ingredient in understanding the devil is understanding that all evil—the only real evil there is!—originates in the will of self-determining creatures. It cannot be traced back to the Creator.

For these early fathers this was as true of “natural” evil as it was of moral evil. Against all who attributed “natural” disasters to God, for example, Origen insists, “famine, blasting of the vine and fruit trees, pestilence among men and beasts: all these are the proper occupations of demons.”³⁴ So too demons are “the cause of plagues . . . barrenness . . . tempests . . . [and] similar calamities.”³⁵ Similarly, Tertullian argues that

³²Origen *Against Celsus* 4.65 (ANF 4:527). For Origen, to be “possessed of reason” and to possess free will are synonymous.

³³Ibid., 4.66 (ANF 4:527).

³⁴Ibid., 8.31 (ANF 4:651).

³⁵Ibid., 1.31 (ANF 4:409). Interestingly enough, Origen relates the power of demons in the natural world to the “nourishment” they gain from “the savor of burnt sacrifices, blood, and