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THE PROBLEM OF EVIL
IN
SELECTED EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

by
Glenn Smith

Thesis presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Ottawa
as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
(Religious Studies)

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. R. Pummer



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ISBN 0-315-75025-1

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UNIVERSITÉ D'OTTAWA
UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

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PREAMBLE

The two roots of this thesis began at about the same time. As I have had occasion to travel to and spend time in several world class cities of the First World and the Two-Thirds World, I developed a growing uneasiness about the plight of the poor. As I spent time in the ghettos of Port-au-Prince, Haiti and Bangkok, Thailand, in the garbage communities of Manila in the Philippines, and among my dear Cambodian refugee friends in Montreal, my concern for a faith that was a true praxis deepened. How does one answer the evils and the injustices of life?

Throughout this period, three faculty members of the Religious Studies Department at the University of Ottawa gave me a love for the literature of the Early Church. Their encouragement and patience pushed me to read the works of the patristic period and explore the themes that surfaced from the contexts of the first five centuries of the history of the church.

It was at this juncture that I began to ask the same questions of the patristic texts that I was asking of the situations I faced in my city and the cities of the world I visited. This thesis is an initial attempt to understand how four authors of one period of the Early Church came to understand the justice of God in the midst of evil. Their reflections in the context of real life issues, lived out in their community of faith, stand in stark contrast to our rather bland "volumes of discourse" on the subject, offering little to no hope to the victims of structural injustice or human suffering.

I wish to thank those three professors for their immense contributions to my life and reflections. For a part-time graduate student who spent parts of three different decades discussing these issues with them, I thank them for their patience.

I also wish to thank my secretary, Margaret Bolo, who faithfully typed and retyped this text.

Thanks as well to my three daughters, Jenna, Julia and Christa, who have never known daddy when he has not been working on this reflection. I trust that together we can work for the welfare of the city (Jeremiah 29:7), learning from the lives and writings of our rich Christian tradition.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Sandra. When she encouraged me to get a second graduate degree in 1977, little did she realize where it would lead and how long it would take. No one has taught me to do theology in context more than her. Her questions, reflections and faithful editing (a trade she mastered while I did this document) have been deeply appreciated.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A BIBLICAL THEODICY

The questions of human suffering and social injustice are recurring issues in the Bible. Far from hidden away in selected texts, these questions appear as key themes throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the course of time, these passages become foundational for reflection by early church writers who were confronted, in their own time, with the awesome realities of evil and suffering.

The Bible provides at least two insights, within the scope of God's cosmic plan, into human suffering. First, suffering is viewed as punishment for disobedience and second, as a situation for spiritual formation, discipline and testing. Furthermore, it is in the context of social injustice, the inhumanity of people towards others, that scripture clarions God's message. Consistently, suffering and evil are presented as one of the facts of human existence. The central questions are not why suffering and injustice exist, but why some people, and not others, are afflicted and how to combat evil in the world.

HUMAN SUFFERING

It is in the very essence of the Old Testament as a record of God's intervention in human history that a context is created for pursuing an understanding of the existence of human suffering. Repeatedly we are confronted with the question of why God intervenes when He does and more

importantly, when He does not.¹ But in examining this theme of human pain we must ask, "Why do the just suffer?"

The Deuteronomist presents us with the covenantal dimensions of suffering. It seems that a very simple cause-effect relationship is presented,

If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands that I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God:

You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country...

However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country...

(Deuteronomy 28:1-3 & 15-16)²

This paradigm is also found in the record of the kings. As the reign of Manasseh, for example, is drawing to a close, we read,

He built altars in the temple of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, 'In Jerusalem I will put my Name.' In both courts of the temple of the LORD, he built altars to all the starry hosts. He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger...

The LORD said through his servants the prophets: 'Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable sins...I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle...'

(2 Kings 21:4-6; 10-12)

Van Rad sees in this Deuteronomistic account the phenomenon of salvific history where "the word of Yahweh functioned in history...a course of history

¹This theme is developed in *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* by John Bowker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) see chapter 1.

²All quotes from *The Bible* are cited from The New International Version unless otherwise mentioned.

which was shaped and led to fulfillment by a word of judgment and salvation continually injected into it."³

The Chronicler records this same understanding of human suffering. In Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 6:12-42) the theme of suffering for disobedience is implied in his intercession for the people after a potential defeat by an enemy (24), for the land in the midst of drought (26) and in the face of famine or plague (28).

And the prophet Isaiah wrote,

Tell the righteous it will be well with them,
for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds.
Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them!
They will be paid back for what their hands have done.
(Isaiah 3:10-11)

Yet interestingly enough, many authors of the Old Testament knew that sin was not always punished. God did not always intervene. In Jeremiah we read,

You are always righteous, O LORD,
when I bring a case before you.
Yet I would speak with you about your justice:
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all the faithless live at ease?
(Jeremiah 12:1)

The Psalmist on numerous occasions voiced the same complaint.⁴

Therefore, it is not just the existence of human suffering which was integral to biblical reflection but its distribution. Why do the wicked go unpunished? Yes, many do suffer punishment for abandoning the covenant, but what of those who do not suffer? The Psalter provides the most poignant answers,

Do not fret because of evil men
or be envious of those who do wrong;

³G. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1 (London: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1962) 343-344.

⁴see Psalms 10, 37 and 73.

for like grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.
(Psalm 37:1-2)

And he continues,

Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret - it leads only to evil.
For evil men will be cut off,
but those who hope in the LORD will
inherit the land.
(Psalm 37:8-9)

The most common solution was to assert that God's retribution had been delayed, yet it was coming.⁵

But in the context of human suffering, what of those people who are just and follow God's ways yet suffer? This leads to the second insight for human suffering. It was viewed as a context for spiritual formation, discipline and testing. This instruction is clearly seen in the wisdom literature,

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline
and do not resent his rebuke,
because the LORD disciplines those he loves,
as a father the son he delights in.
(Proverbs 3:11-12)

The Psalmist carries the same instruction. The acrostic of Psalm 119 celebrates the virtues of God's ways and His word in the life of the community. The writer states,

Your hands made me and formed me;
give me understanding to learn your commands,
May they who fear you rejoice when they see me,
for I have put my hope in your word.
I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous,
and in faithfulness you have afflicted me.
May your unfailing love be my comfort,
according to your promise to your servant.
(Psalm 119:73-76)

⁵see Proverbs 24:19.

This principle of being afflicted⁶ in the context of God's righteous ways and His loving-kindness⁷ is brought to a head in the rather dramatic story of Job. The dialogue between him and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar and Elihu takes place in a unique context. Job is cited for being "blameless, upright; he feared God and shunned evil."⁸ But he was tested in order to challenge his faithfulness.⁹ Job saw his situation in similar terms to Psalm 119:75,

Now that God has unstrung my bow
and afflicted me,
they throw off restraint in my presence.
(Job 30:11)

Job's friends try numerous arguments to challenge his position,¹⁰ but it is God that has the final word. Taunted by Satan, God allowed Job to be tested to freely prove his love for his creator. His prosperity was no mere facade for belief. He clung to God's justice¹¹ when he had every reason to follow his wife's advice instead.¹² God's answer is cosmic in scope. Rather than providing a mere formula to "decode" the issue, God spoke within the context of creation,¹³ a Provider ultimately interested in love freely returned.

These two themes, implicit in human suffering from the Old Testament, (punishment for disobedience and a context for spiritual formation), continue

⁶The Hebrew word carries the idea of finding oneself in a lowly, stunted, humble position. See L.J. Coppes, Entry 1652 (נָחַץ) *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament II*, ed. Harris, Archer, Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 682-684.

⁷Ibid., I, 305-307.

⁸Job 1:1.

⁹Job 1:6-12; 2:1-10.

¹⁰Job 32:1-4.

¹¹Job 19:25

¹²Job 2:9-10

¹³Job 38:4ff.

in the New Testament. In the Gospels,¹⁴ Paul's letters,¹⁵ and the Judeo-Christian epistles,¹⁶ we see both of these themes repeatedly. But now with the advent of God's kingdom rule in Jesus Christ, a new corporate identity is forged, transcending suffering and death and providing a new understanding of God's revelation in history.

This very principle is illustrated in Jesus' public ministry,

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'
'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

(John 9:1-5)

The predominant Old Testament paradigm (see page 2) comes through in both the disciples' observations and questions, yet Jesus challenges this uniform interpretation in presenting new perspectives concerning his advent and work in human history.

He saw humanity in a state of alienation from God. For this reason He defines His mission, *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."* The synoptic gospels provide images of healing the spiritually sick, providing an avenue for sinners to repent, and showing compassion for the lost. But He also saw the world in the throes of the powers of darkness. Three times in John's gospel, Jesus referred to the prince of this world. In Jesus' "launching His final offensive," the evil one would be driven out, would have no hold on Him, and would be condemned. Suffering, therefore, in the New Testament, is intimately linked to the cosmic order.

¹⁴Luke 13:1-5.

¹⁵Romans 8:18-27.

¹⁶1 Peter 4:12-19.

Yet, all events and teaching in the Gospels lead directly to "an event which epitomizes the fearful agencies of human suffering - an innocent and early death of an all too typical savagery."¹⁷ The cross of Christ is God's own self-justification in a world marked by pain. P.T. Forsythe developed this dimension of the cross as the essence of theodicy in his book, The Justification of God, written in 1917. He subtitled it, "Lectures for War-Time in a Christian Theodicy." Faced with the case of a defective, sinful world and a perfect, holy God in collision, he writes, "There is no theodicy for the world except in a theology of the cross."¹⁸

Therefore, this New Testament paradigm of human suffering is deeply rooted in the cross of Christ. In this definitive soteriological act, the New Testament presents the death of Jesus Christ as a dramatic reversal¹⁹ providing not just a forensic reconciliation²⁰ or a moral transformation²¹ but an atonement as,

a Divine conflict and victory: Christ - Christus Victor - fights against and triumphs over the evil powers of the world, the 'tyrants' under which mankind is in bondage and suffering and in Him God reconciles the world to Himself.²²

Paul summarizes the victory of Christ in this crucial New Testament statement,

...He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers

¹⁷Bowker, 46.

¹⁸P.T. Forsythe, *The Justification of God* (London: Latimer House Limited, 1917) 168.

¹⁹Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor* (London: SPCK, 1931) 22.

²⁰This is a very brief description of Anselm's legal view of atonement. See *A History of Christian Doctrine*, ed. H. Cunliffe-Jones (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) chap. III.2.

²¹This is a very brief description of Abelard's moral view of atonement. See *A History of Christian Doctrine*, ed. H. Cunliffe-Jones (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) chap. III.3.

²²Aulen, 20.

and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

(Colossians 2:13-15)

SOCIAL INJUSTICE

The question of the extent of suffering is also evident in the second dimension of this issue - social justice. Rather than a theoretical problem, one is now confronted with evil in daily experience. Nearly every author of the Old Testament denounces those explicit examples of inhumanity.

The Deuteronomist had clearly taught the importance of God's standards of justice,

For the LORD your God is God of gods and LORD of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens in Egypt.

(Deuteronomy 10:17-19)

This standard was repeated throughout the Book of Deuteronomy.²³

In the wisdom literature, both the psalmist and the writer of Proverbs state these same statements of justice,

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,
the maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them-
the LORD, who remains faithful forever.
He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free,
the LORD gives sight to the blind,
the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,
the LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the alien
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the way of the wicked.
(Psalm 146:5-9)

²³Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 24:19-22; 27:19.

And in Proverbs one reads,

The LORD tears down the proud man's house
but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact.
(Proverbs 15:25)

This is predicated on a following principle,

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD;
he directs it like a watercourse
wherever he pleases.
All a man's ways seem right to him,
but the LORD weighs the heart.
To do what is right and just
is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

(Proverbs 21:1-3)

But it is the prophets who most explicitly express anger over social injustice. Isaiah,²⁴ Jeremiah,²⁵ Ezekiel²⁶ Zechariah,²⁷ and Amos,²⁸ clarify the message of God's principles.

This call, based on God's character,²⁹ has a double intent. The Old Testament records a desire both to contest and reduce suffering imposed through lack of just standards, and second to identify those who cause the suffering either through deliberate or thoughtless action.³⁰ For example, Amos clearly denounces the lack of justice in the courts, the treatment of the poor, the acceptance of bribes and the oppression of the righteous. He then writes to the one who has been identified³¹ to receive the message,

²⁴Isaiah 1:10-17.

²⁵Jeremiah 7:3-8.

²⁶Ezekiel 22:22-31.

²⁷Zechariah 7:8-12.

²⁸Amos 5:14-17.

²⁹This is clearly seen in the delineation of what God requires in Psalm 15 of the one who will dwell and live in His presence. (See also Deuteronomy 10:17-19.)

³⁰Bowker, 18.

³¹Amos 1:1; 5:1.

Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD!...
 I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
 I cannot stand your assemblies.
 Even though you bring me burnt offerings
 and grain offerings,
 I will not accept them.
 Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,
 I will have no regard for them.
 Away with the noise of your songs!
 I will not listen to the music of your harps.
 But let justice roll on like a river,
 righteousness like a never-failing stream!

(Amos 5:18, 21-24)

The intent of identifying the individual who inflicted the pain through injustice can be far more specific. On two occasions God takes David to task,³² and Jeremiah identifies Zedekiah as the perpetrator of evil³³ which he had underscored throughout his prophecies.

In contrast to the paradigmatic shift we witnessed from the Old Testament to the New Testament over the dimensions of human suffering, in the case of social justice no such shift occurs. In the Gospels,³⁴ the Acts of the Apostles,³⁵ Paul's letters,³⁶ the other epistles³⁷ and Revelation³⁸ we see the same deliberate call to uphold God's just standards. In the synoptic Gospels, Luke identifies Jesus with the Isaiah tradition. The New Testament principle of social justice is illustrated in these words,

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
 because he has anointed me

³²2 Samuel 24:1ff and 2 Samuel 12:1-7.

³³Jeremiah 52:2.

³⁴Matthew 25:31-46.

³⁵Acts of the Apostles - see summary statements 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 6:41-42.

³⁶2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

³⁷James 1:26-27.

³⁸Revelation 21.

to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'
Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat
down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he
began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your
hearing.'

(Luke 4:18-21)

Again we see how the advent of Jesus Christ marks the New Testament
understanding of evil. He identifies himself with the vulnerable of this
world. Far from presenting a philosophical treatise, Jesus takes the side of
the poor, the prisoner, the blind, the oppressed, in other words, those
needing a new standard of justice.

In conclusion, it is also of interest to note the biblical passages touching
on the state of the created order. As we saw (page 2), the land suffers in
the disobedience of humanity to God's revelation³⁹ and is in peril through
social injustice.⁴⁰ Paul also mentions the frustration (οὐ στενάζω) that
creation has been subjected to (συνωδύνω) due to the fall in Romans 8.
Creation longs for liberation.

³⁹2 Chronicles 6:26.

⁴⁰Amos 8:8.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A biblical perspective of the existence of human suffering, social injustice, creational disorder, in other words the problem of evil, defines the parameters of theodicy.

One listens to what God might be saying to humanity through the pain we feel. Christian faith affirms that God has judged and in turn is reconciling human beings to the divine personhood through the revelation of Jesus Christ with the whole created order. Therefore, this understanding can be found in Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension. The cross speaks! This becomes the "cornerstone" of Paul's declaration in his section in Romans 9, 10, 11, when he responds to the question, "Is God unjust?" The answer follows,

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not
pursue righteousness, have attained it, a
righteousness that is by faith;
but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not
attained it.
Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if
it were by works. They stumbled over the
'stumbling stone'.
As it is written, "*See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame.*"

(Romans 9:30-33)

Since the days of Leibneiz, the term 'theodicy' has been used to discuss the paradox and difficulty of reconciling the justice of God with the presence of various forms of evil in the cosmic order. The formulation of the problem takes many forms but is best remembered in David Hume's famous question,

Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?⁴¹

⁴¹D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* 10, ed. H.D. Arlen (New York: Harper, 1948) 66.

Theodicy then requires the believer of theistic tradition to reconcile the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent, just, morally perfect God in a world where evil exists.

But evil is far from generic in form. Traditionally, distinction has been made between "moral evil" and "natural evil". The former begins in human beings and is experienced by those cruel, unjust, vicious or perverse thoughts or deeds that others propagate or is inflicted on one's self. Natural evil encompasses disease, earthquakes, droughts, storms, that begin independently of human actions. But in this context, we must add a discussion on the issue of human suffering. How do we understand pain that is the norm of human life and pain which is intense and protracted? Where does one draw the line in a place like Haiti, where ravage deforestation takes place to heat huts or cook food and therefore causes enormous erosion that inflicts flooding on victims during monsoon season, but goes uncorrected by a malevolent government in an illiterate society? Where is moral evil in this situation? natural evil? the extent of human suffering for "soul-making"?

It is in the context of this question of evil that I intend to examine how different authors of the patristic period of Late Antiquity contributed to the theodicy of the church. As the years 100-324 mark a time of great theological creativity and effort, I will attempt to draw together the contributions of the writers of The Epistle to Diognetus, The Shepherd of Hermas, and Irenaeus and Athanasius. As patristic theodicy moves towards the Augustinian formulation, I will briefly describe his thinking (as found in The Enchiridion). This will help the reader to understand the movement from the biblical material (that I have briefly surveyed) to the patristic formulation.

Few works have been done on this subject in this specific era. Both Machielsens⁴² and Gokey⁴³ have explored the Apostolic Period. Gokey limits his work to how the fathers understood the devil and evil spirits. Machielsens, in a limited work, explores an implicit dualism he sees in the works of the church fathers of the period.

John Hick, in Evil and The God of Love, deals extensively with Irenaeus, developing an "Irenaeian theodicy". It is his attempt to offer an alternative perspective to an Augustinian system which, in his opinion, is rooted in neo-platonic definitions and an unacceptable view of the sinfulness of humanity and the incarnation.

I would like to show that in this development of theodicy we are not dealing with writings that survey "the problem of evil" from metaphysical and onatological dimensions. Their perspective was no philosophical or theoretical enterprise. The lived-understanding of a just, benevolent God, revealed in Jesus Christ to a fallen creation was their response to the painful realities of their specific contexts. The theodicy was lived out in community (κοινωνία) and experienced in the valiant efforts to proclaim the Good News (εὐαγγελίζα).

⁴²J.J. Machielsens, "Le Problème du Mal selon les Pères Apostoliques", *Eglise et Théologie* 12 (1981) 195-214.

⁴³F.X. Gokey, *The Terminology for the Devil and Evil Spirits in the Apostolic Fathers* (Washington: Catholic Univ. of America, 1961).

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In attempting to describe the development of theodicy in the later period of Late Antiquity, one is immediately confronted with methodological problems. These questions fall into three categories. First, what hermeneutical tools are available to analyze the texts in question? In other words, if the theodicy of Late Antiquity is deeply rooted in the context of the period, how will we unearth those contextual issues? Second, what plausability structures existed at the time that allowed the doctrine to be understood and believed? And third, how did these contexts and structures of the period converge to form a theology of the justice of God in the face of evil and suffering? Through the use of a specific paradigm for contextual theology, I shall pursue these questions in an integrated, rather than a systematic, fashion. This paradigm allows us to pursue the "reflection of Christians upon the gospel in light of their own circumstances and how those circumstances shape their response to the gospel."¹

THE ONGOING TASK OF THE THEODICIST

Before addressing these methodological considerations, it is important to understand the task of the theodacist. Numerous paradigms have been suggested over time. In the first chapter we saw the traditional distinction between moral evil and natural evil. P.T. Forsythe points out that philosophy at the turn of the century understood theodicy from two perspectives, "evil as

¹R. J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1986) 1.

suffering and the question of evil as sin."² Historically, one often makes the distinction between solutions to "the problem of evil" as optimistic, dualistic or pessimistic.³ Yet, inherent in any modern paradigm are four fundamental issues that must be addressed - issues that render the task of the theodicy difficult. Each of these issues will surface as we face our methodological concerns and attempt to understand how early church writers understood the dilemmas of evil from their perspective within their context.⁴

First, we live in an age where the predominant worldview differs radically from that of Late Antiquity and that of the Early Church. The Age of Enlightenment radically altered the way theodicy was discussed. With the advent of a "mechanical universe", a deistic philosophy and disputed authoritative Scriptures, a new unlimited confidence in human reason to solve the dilemmas of nature took hold. Theodicy was to give way to an anthropodicy. The problem of evil, although present, was to be discussed from then on in the context of a universe governed by mechanical laws in a closed system.

This is graphically seen in an essay by Ernst Becker. He wrote,

Something entirely different had to be done to explain evil in the world, a theodicy without divine intervention...The only way to achieve this new explanation was gradually to shift the burden from reliance on God's will to the belief in man's understanding and powers.⁵

²P.T. Forsythe, *The Justification of God* (London: Latimer House Ltd., 1917) 135.

³see H. Blocher, *Le Mal et La Croix* (Paris: Sateer, 1990) chapter 1.

⁴I have been greatly helped in this reflection by Kenneth Surin, particularly his work of previously published articles entitled *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Gustav Aulen also posits four "causes of neglect" of the classic idea of atonement (*Christus Victor*:23-29) which parallel the four points I will make for theodicy. Surin does not footnote Aulen at all.

⁵E. Becker, *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man* (New York: Free Press, 1976) 13.

Gustav Aulen illustrates one aspect of this shift when he discusses the theology of the atonement (an integral part of theodicy as we shall see). He attempts to show how the lines drawn in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant that, "both sides lacked real freedom of judgment"⁶ in exploring the issue.

This broad historical shift as a result of the Enlightenment entailed two consequences for the theodacist. First, the Newtonian principle of a self-contained mechanistic system displaced the focus of the theodacist from a supreme being, as architect of the universe, open to providential intervention, to a "clockwork universe", where the possibility of ethical issues was eschewed by the strict laws of a closed system. Second, this shift accentuated the "problem of will" because the plausibility structures of belief were undermined, often discrediting the theodacist who sought to explain occurrences of human suffering and social injustice in terms of the divine. Theodicy has now given way to a "justification of humanity" in the face of the issue. To understand the development of thought in the early church compels the reader to reckon with the fundamental shift in reasoning that has taken place.

Second, because of this paradigm shift, theodicy has become the pursuit of specialists in a very narrow field of philosophical theology. It has become a theoretical enterprise, specializing in focused arguments and subtle distinctions. In the midst of unprecedented human suffering today, it is sad to read that a Christian theodicy "offers an understanding of our human situation but it is not the same as offering practical help and comfort to those in the midst of acute pain and deep suffering."⁷

⁶Aulen, 24.

⁷J. Hick, *An Irenaean Theodicy in Encountering Evil*, ed. S. Davis (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1981) 68.

This is also seen in the summary of one of the world's foremost theodicians, Alvia Plantinga,

Neither a Free Will Defence nor a Free Will Theodicy is designed to be of much help to one suffering from...a storm in the soul...neither will enable someone to find peace with himself and with God in the face of the evil that the world contains.*

This is in stark contrast to the Augustinian formulation which, as we will see, is deeply rooted in his conversion from Manicheism to Christianity or, as we will see, with Irenaeus' theodicy, which dealt specifically with the Gnostic problem in Lyons.

This movement (to a philosophical theodicy from one described as response rooted in a specific historical context) underscores the third issue the theodiciest must face. The specific social\historical reality was always the situation in which theodicy was discussed. Therefore, it is this situation (of evil) that must alter a theodicy in a post-Enlightenment reflection to that of a true praxis. Kenneth Surin describes this in these words,

The evil which results directly from the deeds of men and women and which arises when we compound occurrences of physical evil by our own inhumanity, owes its existence to the deeds of human beings; evil is manifested "in concerto" in the actions of women and men, either individually or in groups. It exists at particular times and in particular places...'

The final reason that renders the theodiciest's task difficult is the inherent problem one faces in discussing the incongruencies of life as experienced in human suffering and social injustice. Without trivializing the pain or minimizing the evil, no one wants to be like one of Job's "friends". There is an extent to which we do injustice to the victims of Pol Pot's holocaust, the plight of people in Soweto, the squatters on the garbage dumps of Manila, when

*A. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 29.

'K. Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 19. For a rebuttal of Surin's praxis see D. O'Connor, "In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy," *Modern Theology* 5 (October 1988): 61-74.

we reduce their pain to a philosophical system defined as "a free will defence" or a "vehicle for soul-making."

The importance of understanding these four issues can best be illustrated by examining the theodicy of one work from the Apostolic Period. The Epistle to Diognetus is an apologetic work concerning the God whom Christians trust and why they take no account of other gods and superstitions.

Henry Meecham, in the last major study of this epistle, calls it "a literary nexus between the practical exhortations of the Fathers and the more formal apologies of Justin and his successors."¹⁰ Of unknown authorship,¹¹ Westcott comments, "It is enough that we can regard it as the natural outpouring of a Greek heart holding conversation with a Greek mind in the language of old philosophers."¹² Through a series of twelve chapters, the author addresses questions of the heathen (chapter II), the Jews (III and IV), Christians (V - VII) and the Son of God (VIII and IX). Meecham is undoubtedly right when he states that the two-fold aim of the work is to underscore the validity of Christian truth and to justify the place of Christians in their culture by affirming their integrity.¹³ It is little wonder that among the accolades of

¹⁰H.G. Meecham, *The Epistle to Diognetus* (Manchester: The University Press, 1949) 4.

¹¹Much debate surrounds the authorship of this work. Lightfoot in *The Apostolic Fathers* briefly surveys the principal lines of the argument in one paragraph in the preface to his translation of the address. Robert Grant in *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* agrees with Marrou in attributing it to Pantaeaus but he does not defend this choice of author. Quasten, on the other hand, details Andriessen's choice of Quadratus as author and implies agreement (*Patrology v.I*). Meecham includes a lengthy description of various possibilities but shows no preference. I would tend to agree with A. C. Coxe in his preface to this work in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* I who commented on the possibility that Clement of Rome or Apollos wrote the piece (but would extend the comment across the whole field of inquiry) - "Such opinions, however, are pure fancies, which it is perhaps impossible to refute, but which rest on nothing more than conjecture."

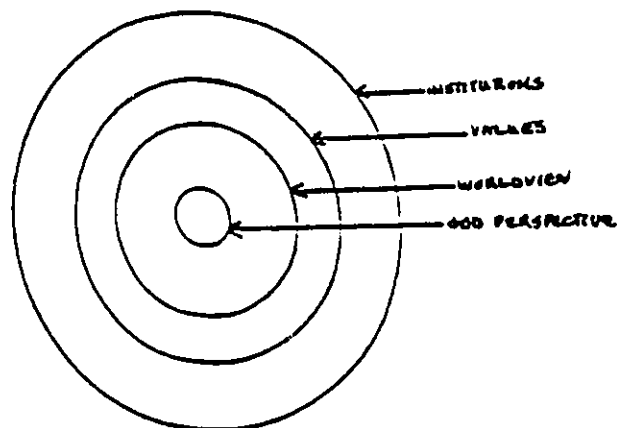
¹²Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1874) 86.

¹³Meecham, 12.

this work are Lightfoot's words that it is "the noblest of early Christian writings."¹⁴

In analyzing this work, I am employing a social hermeneutic that employs linguistic tools to deal with the text as an entity and historical tools that allow one to examine the past in a cross cultural fashion. In the process, I have used a paradigm designed by Robert J. Schreiter (see page 23) applying a structural\functionalist model for cultural analysis.

I have found the use of four concentric circles representing four layers of the social reality to be the most helpful tool for cross cultural analysis. In adapting this form of a structural\functionalist model, I am intentionally opting for this approach over and above a conflict or symbolic paradigmatic analysis.¹⁵ Yet I have attempted to adapt my model to incorporate principles for other models.



This diagram presupposes a definition of culture. I would adhere very closely to the following description,

¹⁴J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 182.

¹⁵B. Malina, "The Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 36 (1982) 229-242.

Culture is an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.) and of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), which bind a society together and give it a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity.¹⁶

Therefore, I have adopted the diagram so as to look at the customs and institutions of this urban culture as the outer layer - that which is readily observed by the analyst. The second layer represents the values of this evolving society - that which is considered as important. The third circle represents the worldview - "the central control box" - of the culture. It is in this domain that the presuppositions of a culture undergo transformation. Finally, the innermost circle represents the understanding of the divine. This is the heart of the society that gives coherence to all the other dimensions.

In addressing Diognetus, the author's insight into Christians of that time, is a good description of their role and impact in a specific context. In an insightful section,¹⁷ mentioning their urban situation, the writer twice details their lifestyle and role. It is not their citizenship, linguistic abilities, background or ethnicity that distinguishes these Christians. They do not have their own separate cities or a special way of talking. They integrate into the culture with integrity and display their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. They see themselves as sojourners, but marry and have children like all people.

This urban context means that they bear their share in all things as citizens. They are persecuted by all, and have their meals in common but do not share their wives. They are ignored, condemned, and even put to death. They are

¹⁶J. Stott and R. Coote, *Down to Earth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 313.

¹⁷*The Epistle to Diognetus*, 5-6.

beggars, are often dishonoured, maligned, reviled, insulted, and even punished as evil doers.

But it is their impact on culture that is most striking. They do not practice "casting off their offspring," adultery, or revenge in word or action. They follow the law, live as the poor and do good.

The statement at the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapter 6 is classic,

War is raged against them as aliens by the Jews and persecution is carried on against them by the Greeks and yet those that hate them cannot tell the reason of their hostility. In a word, what the soul is in a body, this the Christians are in the world.¹⁸

The response they have as sojourners is not "an extraordinary kind of life" but one "which set forth, is marvelous and confessedly contradicts expectation." Therefore, in the realities of the urban world they live in, the writer describes a unique people - "they do not live after the flesh, they surpass the laws in their own lives, they love all men, they make many rich, they abound in all things, they are glorified in their dishonour, they are vindicated, they bless, they respect, they do good, they rejoice, as if they were thereby quenched by life."¹⁹

This "urban theodicy" is very similar to that described by P.T. Forsythe, Kenneth Surin and Donald MacKinnon. This is a theodicy that endures in the face of ultimate contradictions and finds assurance "that in the worst that can befall his creatures, the creative Word keeps company with those he has called his own."²⁰

¹⁸Ibid.

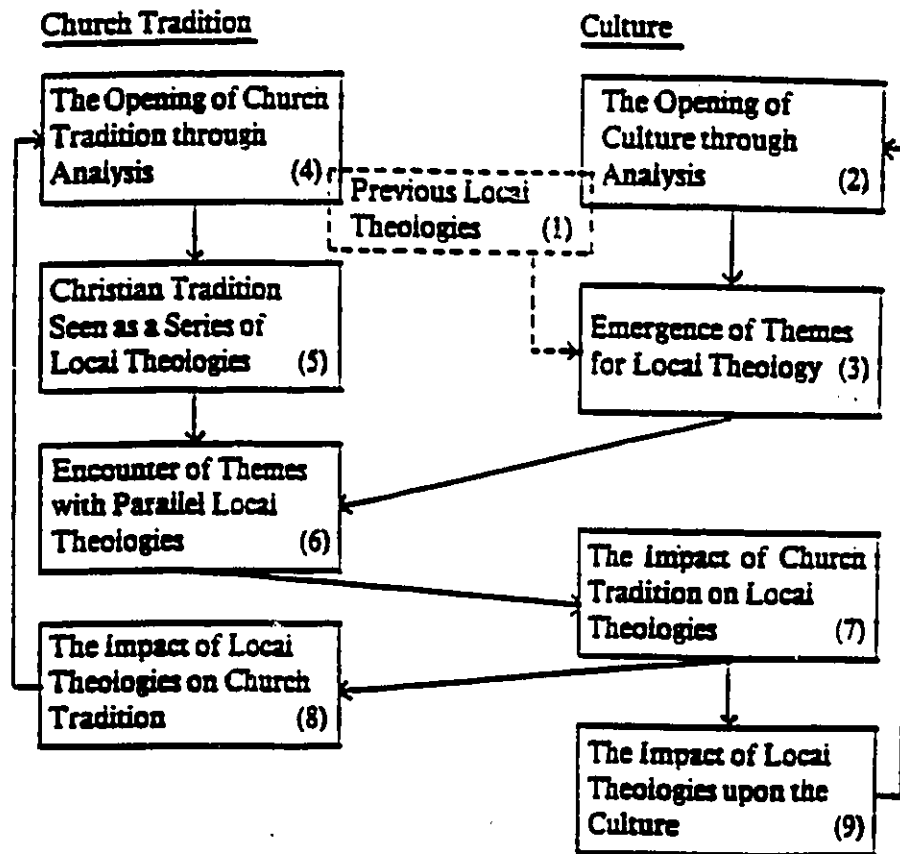
¹⁹Ibid., 5.

²⁰D. MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (New York: Lippincott, 1968) 93.

In a very specific context, the author describes a praxis that is a lived reality. It is no mere philosophical theodicy divorced from the day-to-day context.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In his book, Constructing Local Theologies, R.J. Schreiter has proposed a paradigm from field and systems theory, to map the development of a local theology where the three principal roots of gospel, church and culture converge.²¹ Although he specifically applies the theory to construct contextualized theologies (i.e., a local theology) for the modern world, I believe it is a useful tool to understand the development of theodicy in Late Antiquity.



²¹R.J. Schreiter, 20-23.

Schreiter's "map" is based on nine areas²² that indicate the ideal flow in the process of constructing a local theology. He begins with a description of previous theologies (AREA ONE) that are perceived to be no longer adequate or have become an obstacle to the development of the church in a specific context. In the framework of this reflection, we have already described biblical theodicy (see chapter 1), pointing out the development that was occurring because of contextual factors. The biblical paradigm remained a "powerful reminder" to early Christian writers who developed the theodicy of the period. This is followed in AREAS 2 and 3 by an analysis of culture leading to an understanding of the important themes. Schreiter suggests a semiotic analysis of culture.²³

As we proceed through our texts I will attempt both a macro description of the era as well as a micro analysis of the typical interpersonal behaviour displayed by members of the early church in the texts under consideration. I will attempt to apply the principles of a "moderate functionalism"²⁴ model to examine the interaction of people through the expected patterns and purposes or concerns of the texts of the period.

This is in a very real sense and application of a social hermeneutic. In the words of Wayne Meeks, this means first that,

to the extent that the sources and our abilities permit, we must try to discern the texture of life in particular times and particular places. After that, the task of the social historian...is to describe the life of the ordinary Christian within that environment.²⁵

This will lead secondly,

²²Ibid., 25.

²³Ibid., 56.

²⁴W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale, 1983) 6.

²⁵Ibid., 10.

to describe as fully as possible both the social milieu and internal social forms of the communities so that we can hold that context firmly in mind as we now try to supply the lines and shadows of doctrine.²⁶

Following this cultural analysis, one can see more clearly how the context influenced the development of theodicy. Then in Schreiter's paradigm (AREAS 4, 5 and 6), which include the understanding of church tradition through analysis and the emergence of themes which influence the new local theology, one sees how the community, in turn, influenced its situation through its understanding of the work of Jesus Christ in the context of the suffering and injustice she experienced.

It is in this inter-play of theme (being the development of the theodicy in the specific historical context) with community, where we see the importance of the early Christian plausibility structure.²⁷ Any idea is considered intelligible by the social and material reality in which it is rooted. This social structure of ideas and practices created the conditions which determined the beliefs that would be accepted in that society. In commenting on Pauline theodicy, Wayne Meeks underscores this principle when he comments that Paul's letters do not posit a general theodicy rather,

It is the continuing solidarity of the Christian community transcending death, or present solidarity of those who must not pretend that death is no longer real, or the right understanding of apostolic power that is addressed, not the general human problem of morality. But the fact itself points to the social context within which the talk about evil and salvation has its meaning and validity.²⁸

²⁶Ibid., 164.

²⁷I am using the expression "plausibility structure" in the sense of a social structure of ideas and practices that create the conditions determining what beliefs are believable within the society in question. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986) 10-16; Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1979) 130-140 and Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (Downer's Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983) 142-145.

²⁸Meeks, 189.

As the doctrine of theodicy develops through the period of the Apostolic Fathers," the community of believers becomes the implicit structure to mediate the understanding of the cross of Christ in increasing malevolent situations.

The final three AREAS (7, 8, 9) of Schreiter's paradigm touch on the ensuing impact that this new local theology had on culture and church tradition, as well as the impact the church tradition had on the developing theology.

In giving careful consideration to the methodological questions that have been cited, I think that it can be shown that the theodicy of the ensuing period was a "lived understanding" of a just, benevolent God revealed in Jesus Christ, who, because of His death on the cross, gave hope to the harsh realities of the specific sociological contexts which the people were experiencing. The context in which The Shepherd of Hermas was written, and in which Irenaeus and Athanasius were to write, plays a similar role to that of the context for The Epistle to Diognetus. In each case, I will attempt to show this theodicy was lived out in the radical partnership of the community (κοινωνία) and proclaimed in the Gospel they shared. It was a powerfully lived, yet local theology. Their formulations were to contribute significantly to the Augustinian formulation.

²⁹H.J. de Jonge, "On the Origin of the Term 'Apostolic Fathers', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (Oxford 1978) 503-505.

CHAPTER THREE

TOWARDS THE AUGUSTINIAN FORMULATION

Early Christian writers continued to explore the two questions found throughout scriptures of human suffering and social justice. During the time of the Apostolic Fathers, the accent was placed on the ethical dimensions involved in suffering and evil. As we will see later, there was a preoccupation with human suffering inflicted because of immoral behaviour.¹

In the third century, Clement of Alexandria (150-215) wrote extensively on the subject of evil. His work is considered "...as a watershed in the development of this idea."² To the baptized, he described suffering as a context for spiritual growth,

Do not be wholly crushed at heart by grief, whether it is illness which weighs you down or whether some other harsh experience comes your way. Confront your hardships with nobility of understanding, giving thanks to God even in the midst of your painful difficulties. His purposes are wiser than men's, and it is not possible or easy for men to divine them..."³

Cyprian (205-258), in writing to The Lapsed, lashed out against the sins that beset the church of the third century. In his pastoral exhortation that sees suffering as punishment for willful sin, he recounts the lot of certain individuals. They were content to increase their family possessions and to redouble their wealth. They showed no interest in acts of mercy, no self-mastery and treated superiors with contempt. He then writes,

¹J.J. Machielsen, "Le Problème du Mal selon les Pères Apostoliques", *Eglise et Théologie* 12 (1981) 195-214.

²W.E.G. Floyd, *Clement of Alexandria's Treatment of the Problem of Evil* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971) xviii.

³Clement, *To Those Just Baptized* 12.

For sins of this kind there is no punishment that people like us do not deserve to suffer. God's judgment long ago warned us with the words: 'If they forsake my law and walk not in my judgments, if they profane my justice and keep not my commandments, I will visit their iniquities with a rod and their sins with stripes.'⁴

Yet a transition in context throughout Late Antiquity, brings a change in focus in the literature of the Patristic period.

The broader religious context provided further dimensions to the early church's desire to respond to evil. Whether it be Gnosticism, Manichaeism or heretical movements born within the church, the writings of the period underscore this preoccupation with resolving the problem of evil. Tertullian,⁵ Irenaeus,⁶ Titus,⁷ and Augustine⁸ are only a select number of the many who dealt with the issue.

The persecutions of the late second and third centuries were often viewed as the social context in which the church was to painfully suffer. From the time of persecution in Lyon in the second century we read,

For though we are beheaded, and crucified and exposed to beasts and chains and fire and all other forms of torture, it is plain that we do not forsake the confession of our faith, but the more things of this kind happen to us so much the more are there many others who become believers and truly religious through the name of Jesus...'

Repeatedly throughout this period, writers would use the imperial persecutions as a context to address the subject of evil.¹⁰

⁴Cyprian, *The Lapsed* 6.

⁵Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.4, 1-8.

⁶Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.62.

⁷Titus, *Against the Manichaeans* 1.4.

⁸Augustine, *The Enchiridion of Faith, Hope and Love* 10-16.

⁹Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, vol. 65.

¹⁰F.A. Norwood documents this issue at length in *Strangers and Exiles: A History of Religious Refugees* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968) chap. 3.

The account of Perpetua's martyrdom presents an interesting case in point because of the interplay of themes of the devil, persecution and the imminent birth of her child. The lengthy description of her death underscores the early church's victory in the face of the evils inflicted through persecution.

Describing the arrival of "the day of their victory", the author of The Martyrdom of Perpetua,¹¹ chronicles the events leading up to death. It was a march from the dungeon to heaven, a second baptism. "The devil readied the mad cow." But it was the sword that brought martyrdom,

But Perpetua, in order to feel some of the pain, groaning as she was struck between the ribs, took the gladiator's trembling hand guiding it to her throat. Perhaps it was that so great a woman, feared as she was by the unclean spirit, could not have been slain had she not herself willed it...¹²

But it is in the last century of antiquity that evil receives its full definition and treatment in the light of a Christian worldview. Although Irenaeus of Lyon (120-202) and Clement had already proposed definitions, Athanasius (298-373) is unequivocal in Against the Pagans in defining evil as the work of sinful humanity revolting against a good God.

Evil did not exist from the beginning, and even today it is not present among the holy angels, for it does not exist at all there. It was later that men began to think of it and to fashion it within themselves. Hence they formed for themselves the notions of idols, accounting as existent non-existent things. God, the Creator and King of all, who lies beyond all being and beyond all human concepts, has through his own Word our Saviour Jesus Christ made the human race in his image. Because he is good and surpassingly noble, he made man observe and become aware of reality by making man like himself; he gave him also awareness and knowledge of his own immortality, so that by preserving his likeness he might never forsake his vision of God, or recoil from the company of the angels. Rather, he would retain the grace of God who had endowed it, and live an immortal life, painless and truly blessed...¹³

¹¹P. Wilson-Kastner et al., *A Lost Tradition: Women Writers of the Early Church* (New York and London: Univ. Press of America, 1981).

¹²Ibid., 30.

¹³Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 2.3.

Basil (330-379) developed this definition further by adding the idea that evil is a privation of good,

In short, do not regard God as the cause of the substance of evil. Do not imagine that evil has a substance to it. Wickedness does not exist like some living thing. We cannot set it before our eyes as something existing. Evil is a privation of good.¹⁴

This reflection was to be more fully described during the early church period in the works of St. Augustine (354-430). In reality, all theodicy was to move towards his articulation of the doctrine. Samuel Lieu writes,

Augustine's effort to solve the problem of evil in the face of the Manichaean challenge is an important landmark in the development of Christian thought...no Christian thinker had tackled the problem of evil with as much thoroughness and mastery of philosophical arguments as did Augustine.¹⁵

The Enchiridion of Faith, Hope and Love, a work of Augustine's mature reflection, provides an outline of his thinking. It will serve the structure of our own reflection if we examine Augustine's theodicy in this handbook, as it exemplifies the direction in which the doctrine develops in the period under question.

Within the introductory chapters of Augustine's handbook, we see his primary presuppositions for all that he wishes to say to Laurentius' questions concerning "what is the sum of the whole body of doctrine..."¹⁶ and this issue of God's justice. He writes,

It is enough for the Christian to believe that the only cause of all created things, whether heavenly or earthly, whether visible or invisible, is the goodness of the Creator, the one true God; and that nothing exists but Himself that does not derive from Him...¹⁷

¹⁴Basil, *God is Not the Author of Evils* 3.

¹⁵T.S. Lieu, "Some Themes in Late Roman Anti-Marcion Polemics II," *The Bulletin of The John Rylands Library* 65, (1987) 248.

¹⁶Augustine, 4.

¹⁷Ibid., 9.

It is most important that we underscore this presupposition in presenting Augustine's theodicy. He agrees with the other writers of the early period who played a part in the evolution of Christian doctrine. He stands in that very essential flow of Christian thought. The Creed of Nicea stated, "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible;" and Augustine was to repeat it often in another work,

Therefore, if the world was made out of some unformed matter, that matter was made out of absolutely nothing. If it was as yet unformed, still it was at least capable of receiving form. By God's goodness, it is formable. Even capacity for form is good...All that exists receives existence from God, and that which does not yet exist but may do so, receives its potential existence from God. In other words, all that is formed receives its form from God, and from him all that is not yet formed receives power to be formed. Nothing has integrity of nature unless it be whole of its kind. From God comes all wholeness as every good thing comes from him.¹⁸

God is the author of all life.

Augustine saw nothing greater than the character of the Almighty and His subsequent working as creator and sustainer,

The conclusion from all this is that God is never to be blamed for any defects that offend us, but should ever be praised for all the perfection we see in the natures He has made. For God is Absolute being and therefore all other being that is relative was made by Him. No being that was made from nothing could be on a par with God, nor could it even be at all, were it not made by Him.¹⁹

It is little wonder that he wrote,

You stimulate him to take pleasure in praising you because you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they can find peace in you.²⁰

¹⁸Augustine, *On True Religion* 18.

¹⁹Augustine, *Confessions* 11,5.

²⁰Ibid., I,1.

This is all said as a "point of departure", not to minimize other influences in Augustine's system or even deny their existence, but to strive to represent his thought as he wrote it.

It naturally follows from this initial point that Augustine would then speak of the goodness of all created things. In chapters 10-16 of The Enchiridion, he often repeats different aspects of this well-known dimension of his theodicy.

By the Trinity, thus supremely and equally and unchangeably good, all things were created; and these are not supremely and equally and unchangeably good but yet they are good, even taken separately.²¹

All things that exist, therefore, seeing that the Creator of them all is supremely good, are themselves good.²²

The corollary to this principle is also expressed in these same chapters.

Every being, therefore, is a good; a great good if it cannot be corrupted; a little good if it can; but in any case, only the foolish or ignorant will deny that it is good. And if it be wholly consumed by corruption, then the corruption itself must cease to exist, as there is no being left in which it can dwell.²³

To the question, then, "What is evil?" Augustine gives us no long explanation in The Enchiridion. He writes succinctly, "For what is that which we call evil but the absence of good?"²⁴ In other writings, we get a more complete picture of his perspective,

...What is evil? Perhaps you will reply, Corruption. Undeniably this is a general definition of evil; for corruption implies opposition to nature; and also hurt. But corruption exists not by itself, but in some substance which it corrupts; for corruption itself is not a substance. So the thing which it corrupts is not corruption, is not evil; for what it corrupted suffers the loss of integrity and purity. Again, what is corrupted is perverted; and what is perverted suffers the loss of order, and order is good. To be corrupted, then, does not imply the absence of

²¹Augustine, *Enchiridion* 10.

²²Ibid., 12.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 11.

good; for in corruption it can be deprived of good, which could not be if there was the absence of good.²⁵

We must define this by saying that a privation is the absence (or lack) of something that ought to be there.

Hick sees in this definition, neo-platonic themes. Quoting from Enneads, he establishes the metaphysical system of Plotinus and his view of matter and evil as the chief influence of his theodicy. From his point of view, this "...is to reappear again and again in the course of Christian reflection on the problem of evil."²⁶

Two very important points must be noted. There is certainly no overwhelming amount of agreement with Hick on this point. Stanley Hooper has responded by writing,

No doubt this claim is excessive, as it does not take into account sufficiently the psychological or existential focus on evil which accompanies this Neo-Platonic development and which steadily matured throughout his later works toward the primacy of the Biblical categories.²⁷

Furthermore, Hick is confusing theodicy with apologetic defence. Theodicy is a theological statement for God's justice. A defence is not an explanation of what God's reason is, but what God's reason might be. Augustine is a theodiciest in that he is attempting to tell us why God permits evil. Hick is analyzing Augustine's theodicy as a defence for the existence of evil in the cosmos, therefore totally discounting the context that gave birth to the formulation.

²⁵Augustine, *On the Morals of the Manichaens* 5.7.

²⁶J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Glasgow: MacMillan, 1966) 46.

²⁷Battenhouse, *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) 168.

But what is the Augustinian context that gave birth to this formulation as found in The Enchiridion? Two issues must be underscored - his own conversion from Manichaeism and the prevailing social order.

Both Kenneth Surin and Gillean Evans have described both of these crucial influences in Augustine's life. His doctrine of grace, ("if a man could deserve God's grace that would make grace a lesser thing; only if it is utterly undeserved is it truly a free gift")²⁸, underscores his whole orientation to conversion and therefore his understanding of a solution to the problem of evil. The human person is undeniably trapped,

The enemy held fast my will and had made of it a chain and had bound me tight with it. For out of the perverse will came lust, and the service of lust ended in habit and habit not resisted became necessity...a hard bondage held me in slavery.²⁹

God's intervention in Jesus Christ, illuminates the person with grace and provides an authentic answer to this troubling dilemma.

In Confessions he can then write,

For he did not delay, but rushed on, calling to us by what he said, and what he did, calling to us by his death and life, descent and ascension, to return to him. And he withdrew from our eyes, that we might return to our own heart and find him.³⁰

But this dilemma arose for Augustine in a world context where Christianity was the state religion benefiting from official status. The world had changed and as Peter Brown has pointed out, this meant for Augustine that the,

²⁸G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982) 128.

²⁹Augustine, *Confessions* VIII, V, 10.

³⁰Augustine, *Confession* IV, 12.

...Christian's worst enemies could no longer be placed outside himself; they were inside, his sins and doubts; and the climax of a man's life would not be martyrdom but conversion from the peril's of the past.³¹

Therefore, in challenging the Manichaens, among whom he had been an "auditor", Augustine accuses them of "rendering God less than omnipotent by removing him entirely from the horror of human existence."³² Their dualistic system not only attributed evil to the divine but emptied God of significance because it brought passivity to goodness. We see his attack on this very issue in his description of the Manichaens in the Confessions and the inner struggle that goes on between the two natures. For that reason, he states in The Enchiridion (as we have seen), "It is enough for the Christian to believe that the only cause for all created things...is the goodness of the Creator..."³³ It is little wonder then that Evans could summarize Augustine's position from a contextual point of view in these words,

Augustine's concern was, then, with a local problem of long standing and of more than local importance... His engagement with the problem was practical rather than intellectual...³⁴

It is also important to add three points in discussing this issue of evil from The Enchiridion. First, Augustine was quick to point out that because all life was not as supremely good as the Creator, that good had the potential to be diminished or increased,

But for good to be diminished is an evil, although, however much it may be diminished, it is necessary, if the being is, that some good should remain to constitute the being. For however small or of whatever kind the being may be, the good which makes it a being cannot be destroyed without destroying the being itself.³⁵

³¹P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Farber, 1967) 159.

³²Lieu, 242.

³³Augustine, *Enchiridion* 9.

³⁴G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 28.

³⁵Augustine, *Enchiridion* 12.

Second, this led him to see that evil was an exception to the rule of life,

And these two contraries are so far co-existent that if good did not exist in what is evil, neither could evil exist; because corruption could not have wither a place to dwell in, or a source to spring from, if there were nothing that could be corrupted; and nothing can be corrupted except what is good, for corruption is nothing else but the destruction of good.³⁶

And third, God has this whole situation within the sovereignty of His person,

For the Almighty God, who, even as the heathen acknowledge, has supreme power over all things, being Himself supremely good, would never permit the existence of anything evil among His works, if He were not so omnipotent and good that He can bring good even out of evil.³⁷

Yet how did evil arrive? Why is humanity in this predicament? Augustine points to the misuse of creaturely freedom,

For it is by the evil use of his free-will that man destroyed both it and himself. For, as a man who kills himself must, of course, be alive when he kills himself, but after he has killed himself ceases to live, and cannot restore himself to life; so when man by his free-will sinned, then sin being victorious over him, the freedom of his will was lost. 'For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.' This is the judgment of the Apostle Peter. And as it is certainly true, what kind of liberty, I ask, can the bond-slave possess, except when it pleases him to sin?³⁸

From The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love, we see very clearly what Augustine saw as God's ultimate purpose in allowing the existence of evil, and this becomes, in large measure, the hope of his theodicy. "For he judged it better to bring good out of evil, than not to permit evil to exist."³⁹ This is further expounded at the conclusion of the handbook,

Nor can we doubt that God does well even in the permission of what is evil. For He permits it only in the justice of His judgment. And surely all that is just is good. Although, therefore, evil, so far as it is evil, is not a good; yet the fact that evil as well as good exists, is a good. For if it were not a good that evil should exist, its existence

³⁶Ibid., 14.

³⁷Ibid., 11.

³⁸Ibid., 30.

³⁹Augustine, *On Free Will* 2.53.

would not be permitted by the omnipotent God, who without doubt can as easily refuse to permit what He does not wish, as bring about what He does wish. And if we do not believe this, the very first sentence of our creed is endangered, wherein we profess to believe in God the Father Almighty. For He is not truly called Almighty if He cannot do whatsoever He pleases, or if the power of His almighty will is hindered by the will of any creatures whatsoever.⁴⁰

Augustine's theodicy helps one to understand evil from a contextual point of view, God, as the author of all, created a good universe. Evil seen "in concreto" is not a thing or a substance, but rather a privation or lack in things. God cannot be its author. One must hasten to add that evil is very much like a leech - when it is not present, a thing is better, and in like manner, when all good is taken away, there is nothing left whatsoever. This has been called "evil as an ontological parasite."⁴¹ The freedom of choice that God gave His corruptible creatures leads humanity to its moral problem. There is no metaphysical evil, then; evil arose a measure of man's freedom. As Augustine often said, pride was the beginning of this.⁴²

⁴⁰Augustine, *Enchiridion* 27.

⁴¹N. Geisler, *The Roots of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 47.

⁴²Augustine, *The City of God* 14,13.

CHAPTER FOUR

APOSTOLIC PERIOD

We have attempted to show in the flow of this reflection that in the framework of a biblical theology of God's justice in the face of human suffering and social injustice, that the specific social context helped each writer in question to develop a response that was rooted in the particular situation; a response that was not merely a "theological\philosophical" treatise. By applying a paradigm to study the development of this response, we saw that the address to Diognetus was a holistic response by Christians to the complexities of urban life. As we moved to the works of Augustine, we again saw that in this landmark development he was articulating a praxis that spoke to very specific contextual issues. These two initial writers stand in stark contrast to the perspective often seen today. This point of view was outlined in the second chapter. Today, theodicy is often displaced from divine intervention. It is viewed as a philosophical enterprise divorced from the context in which suffering and injustice occur, and all too often this approach to theodicy trivializes pain.

Yet how does theodicy develop from the period of the address to Diognetus to the fourth century, leading up to the Augustinian formulation?

In his very informative article "Le problème du Mal selon les Pères Apostoliques",¹ John Machielsen stated (through 1981) that he had not been able to locate substantive work that dwelt exhaustively with the Apostolic Fathers view of evil.² This situation remains largely unchanged.

¹John J. Machielsen, "Le Problème du Mal selon les Pères Apostoliques, *Eglise et Théologie* 12 (1981): 195-222.

²Ibid., 195.

Yet, the reality of suffering and social injustice reverberates through the works of these second century writers,

Seeing that the days are evil and that the Active One himself has the authority we ought to give heed to ourselves and to seek out the ordinances of the Lord. The aids of our faith then are fear and patience and our allies are long-suffering and self-restraint.³

To the Corinthians, Clement of Rome wrote,

Since therefore all things are seen and heard, let us fear Him and forsake the abominable lusts of evil works that we may be shielded by His mercy from the coming judgments.⁴

In Didache, we read,

My child, flee from every evil and everything that resembleth it. Be not angry, for anger leadeth to murder, not jealous nor contentious nor wrathful; for by all these things murders are engendered...⁵

Machielsen can then state with reason,

Quant au problème du mal, les pères étaient confrontés avec des problèmes très difficiles, leurs idées dans ce domaine, loin d'être simplicités étaient très variées...⁶

As I have stated earlier, The Epistle to Diognetus presents us with a fascinating urban text.⁷ Chapters 5 and 6 of the address also give us insight into the author's perspective as a Christian response to evil. The urban context in which Christians live means they bear their share in all things as citizens, they are persecuted by all, they do not cast away their offspring, they have their meals in common but do not share their wives, they are persecuted by all, ignored, condemned, put to death, they are beggars, dishonoured, reviled, insulted and punished as evil doers.⁸

³Didache 30.

⁴Clement, *To the Corinthians*, 28.

⁵Didache 3.

⁶Machielsen, 220.

⁷see chapter 2.

⁸*The Epistle to Diognetus* 5 and 6.

As we have seen, the response they have as sojourners is not "an extraordinary kind of life" but rather they have a citizenship "which set forth, is marvelous and confessedly contradicts expectation." Therefore, to the realities of the urban world they live in as do "the rest of mankind", the writer describes a unique people - they live not after the flesh, their citizenship is in heaven, they surpass the laws in their own lives, they love all men, they make many rich, they abound in all things, they are glorified in their dishonour, they are vindicated, they bless, they respect, they do good, they rejoice, as if they were thereby quenched by life.

Unfortunately, Machielsen does not use The Epistle to Diognetus in his article. He chooses all the other works usually cited with the Apostolic Fathers with the exception of The Martyrdom of Polycarp and Diognetus. He does not defend his selection.⁹ Yet, I am forced to question the generalization on which he insists. Machielsen states that the Apostolic Fathers' understanding of evil is based on two contradictions: (1) between God's transcendence and power and the existence and power of evil and Satan and (2) the redemptive activity of Christ and their pessimistic thought that nothing of evil had changed.¹⁰ Otherwise, his insights are valuable.

Rather, The Epistle to Diognetus presents a theodicy rooted in Christ's crucifixion.

To suggest that Christianity deals with the problem of evil by encouraging the believer to view it from a cosmic perspective is totally to misunderstand both the difficulty and the consolation of its treatment. Rather Christianity takes the history of Jesus and urges the believer to find, in the endurance of the ultimate contradictions of human existence that belong to its very substance, the assurance that in the worst that can befall his creatures, the creative Word keeps company with those he has called his own.¹¹

⁹Machielsen, 196. He also identifies four categories of dualism.

¹⁰Ibid., 221.

¹¹D. MacKinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (New York:Lippincott, 1968) 93.

This theodicy is also evident in another work of the period that Machielsen does use.

THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

The Shepherd, as it was known by many ancient writers is better known as The Shepherd of Hermas because of its author, Hermas. He is identified immediately in the first vision, as the slave of Rhoda in Rome.¹²

There is considerable question as to Hermas' true identity. The Muratorian Fragment gives us the earliest insight into this question. There we read, "and very recently in our times in the city of Rome, Hermas wrote The Shepherd when his brother Pius the bishop sat upon the chair of the city of Rome." Origen, in his commentary on Romans, postulates the writer as the Hermas mentioned in chapter 16:14, "Greet Asyncritus, Philegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them." Quasten readily accepts the first possibility with this explanation,

The testimony of the Muratorian Fragment which dates from the close of the second century creates an impression of trustworthiness. But the reign of Pius I falls within 140 A.D. - 150 A.D. hence Hermas' reference to Pope Clement in the second vision was looked upon as fiction. The two dates are accounted for by the way in which the book was compiled. The older portions would most likely go back to Clement's day while the present redaction would be of Pius' time.¹³

Lightfoot is less certain. He writes,

On the whole we may, though not without diffidence, adapt (i.e., Muratorian Fragment) the ancient tradition...¹⁴

¹²*The Shepherd of Hermas*, VISION 1,1.

¹³J. Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1983) 92-93.

¹⁴J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) 162.

Yet we do know a considerable amount about Hermas from the 5 visions, the 12 mandates and the 10 parables of The Shepherd. As we already saw, he was a slave in Rome but seems to have great freedom to travel. He mentions the Via Campana (VISION 2,1; 4,1) and Arcadia (PARABLE 9,1). This should not surprise us about ancient society. Meeks writes, "...that expansion (of the early church) was closely associated with personal mobility, both physical and social."¹⁵ Ronald Hook gives us a fascinating insight into this aspect of life in his book, The Social Context of Paul's Ministry. He writes,

On the roads of the early empire could be found a variety of travelers: government officials, traders, pilgrims, the sick, letter carriers, sightseers, runaway slaves, fugitives, prisoners, athletes, artisans, teachers and students. Conditions for these travelers were as is often remarked, generally good, especially at this time...¹⁶

In the first and second vision we have excellent insights into the author's person,

...Then I, grieved and weeping, said, "Good morrow lady." And she said to me, "Why so gloomy, Hermas, thou are patient and good tempered, and art always smiling?..."¹⁷

We also read,

...Thy seed, Hermas, have sinned against God and have blasphemed the Lord, and have betrayed their parents, through great wickedness, yea, they have got the name of betrayers of parents, and yet they did not profit by their betrayal; and they still further added to their sins wanton deeds and ruthless wickedness; and so the measure of their transgression was filled up...¹⁸

Finally,

...But thou, Hermas, hast had great tribulations of thine own, by the reason of the transgressions of thy family, because thou hadst no care

¹⁵W. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale, 1983) 2.

¹⁶R. Hook, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 27.

¹⁷*The Shepherd of Hermas*, VISION 1,1.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, VISION 2,2.

for them. For thou was neglectful of them, and wast mixed up with thine evil transactions...¹⁹

In MANDATE 7 we have another glimpse of his life,

Thy sins are many, yet not so many that thou shouldest be delivered over to this angel; but thy house has committed great iniquities and sins...²⁰

This negative impression of Hermas' life is most certainly related to the purpose of the work. In four different passages we obtain a clear indication as to the book's purpose. In chronological order we see this developed,

Lady, what doest thou here? Then she answered me, "I was taken up that I might convict thee of thy sins before the Lord."²¹

Such an ethical proclamation is placed in a definite theological context.

From a following vision we see God's grandeur presented as contrast to Hermas' sins,

Behold, the God of Hosts, who by His invisible and mighty power and by His great wisdom created the world and by His strong word fixed the heaven, and founded the earth upon the waters, and by His own wisdom and providence formed His holy church, which also He blessed - behold, He removed the heavens and the mountains and the hills and the seas and all things are made level for His elect, that He may fulfill to them the promise which He promised with great glory and rejoicing, if so be that they shall keep the ordinances of God which they received with great faith...²²

Later, in a revelation, we see another dimension of the book's purpose,

...First of all, write down my commandments and my parables; and the other matters thou shalt write down as I shall show them to thee...that thou mayest read them off-hand, and mayest be able to keep them...²³

¹⁹Ibid., VISION 2,3.

²⁰Ibid., MANDATE 7.

²¹Ibid., VISION 1,1.

²²Ibid., VISION 1,3.

²³Ibid., REVELATION 5.

And finally this is complemented by PARABLE 9,1.

Based on these texts, it is evident that the theme of The Shepherd of Hermas is ethical in nature. But this must be qualified by two statements. Quasten places the work among the apocryphal apocalypses, meaning that these words,

...record the imaginations, hopes and fears of the men who wrote them; they show what was acceptable to the unlearned Christians of the first ages, what interested them, what they admired, what ideals of conduct they cherished for this life, what they thought they would find in the next.²⁴

But second, we are dealing with an early piece of Judeo-Christian literature. There are numerous Jewish themes repeated throughout the work yet all written within the framework of much of the literature of the early church.

This is a unique piece of ethical literature during the Apostolic Period. No other work of this period treats the subject under question in as much detail. One finds scattered references to evil and suffering throughout the combined works of The Apostolic Fathers, but nothing approaching the same thirty passages²⁵ found in this work. But what social context would illicit such a treatment?

As we saw earlier, Meeks has a series of presuppositions developed for analysis of the social context ("...so that we can hold that context firmly in mind as we now try to supply the lines and shadows of doctrine."²⁶) Such an approach is not new considering that the determination of "Sitz im Leben" is standard hermeneutical practice. Bruce Malina²⁷ and Gerd Theissen²⁸ have

²⁴Quasten, 107.

²⁵This number is based on personal research and indexing.

²⁶Meeks, 164.

²⁷for example B. Malina, "The Social Sciences and Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 36 (1982): 229-242.

provided us with theoretical insights into the use of such sociological tools for interpretation. Daniel Harrington has stated that,

...the sociology of early Christianity is the description and analysis of typical interpersonal behaviour displayed by members of early Christian groups. It pays attention to the extraordinary events and conflicts, explicit and implicit norms of conduct, the use of symbols, innovations, causes of success or failure and adjustments from charismatic to institutional forces.²⁹

A consideration and understanding of the evil in the world was of great importance for the primitive church. This is developed in Meeks' treatment of *ekklesia*.³⁰

Unfortunately, he does not deal with perhaps the strongest of social forces, *koinonia*, in dealing with the early church's response to the evil environment. Biblical fellowship had profound implications for the early church. In studying the various Pauline uses of the word, we find three fundamental principles. First, he uses the word to describe a 'legal' relationship (partnership) where there is participation in a ministry (ex. Galatians 2:9). Secondly, the word carries deep religious or spiritual implications: one 'participates' in Christ (ex. I Corinthians 1:9); one 'participates' in the Holy Spirit (ex. Philippians 2:1); one 'participates' in the life and sufferings of Christ (ex. Philippians 3:10); one 'participates' in the Lord's Supper (ex. I Corinthians 10:16,17). And thirdly, this *koinonia* results in deeper participation in the life of the community (Philippians 1:3-6).³¹

²⁹for example G. Thiessen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, translated by J. H. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

³⁰D. Harrington, "Sociological Concepts and the Early Church," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 182.

³¹Meeks, 183-184. "We have seen that to become a member of the Christian *ekklesia* meant strong social change. It entailed entry into an association that represented itself as a new family, replacing other relationships and sources of identity. It meant expecting and experiencing hostility from the outside society."

³²These conclusions are based on research for an unpublished paper I wrote entitled, Koinonia in Contemporary Application.

This alternative view of the world was a kingdom perspective to deal with the surrounding environment. In the context of Rome, the surrounding environment would have included traditional paganism, immorality and astrology.³² But it is the context of urban life that koinonia would have made the most difference. In the context of our cultural paradigm, I would like to examine life in Hermas' Rome.

Rome, due to physical space and vast wealth, represented the empire it had conquered. In every way it was colossal. The first wall laid by King Servius, had now become a thoroughfare - some fifty feet wide. Easily, two chariots could have driven abreast along its expanse. In the context of the primitive forms of military technology it was an example of the extravagant.

The city itself covered some 3200 acres by A.D. 274 but easily expanded to 5000 acres with its ensuing growth. By the beginning of the 4th century, with a population well over 1 million, an inventory of the city included 6 obelisks, 8 bridges, 11 public baths, 19 water channels, 2 circuses, 2 amphitheaters, 3 theaters, 28 libraries, 4 gladiator schools, 5 nautical spectacles for sea fights, 36 marble arches, 37 gates, 290 storehouses and warehouses, 254 public bakehouses, 1,790 palaces, 46,602 lodging-houses (tenements), 926 small privately conducted baths (at any minute, he reckoned 62,800 citizens could use baths) 18 fora or public squares, 8 campi or commons covered with grass throughout the year, used by the multitude for "ball-playing, hoop-trundling, or wrestling"; likewise about 30 parks and gardens, (first laid out by wealthy citizens for their private comfort but eventually absorbed into the public domains), 700 public pools or basins and the 500 fountains, drawing their supply from 130 collecting heads or reservoirs.³³

³²Further documentation on these influences is found in M. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* and R. Martin, *Carmen Christi*.

³³Mumford, *A History of the City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1960) 236.

"To you", Aristides in his laudation of Rome observed, "there comes from all lands and seas what the seasons bring forth and what the climates produce, what rivers and lakes and the handicraft of Hellene or barbarian make. Whoever, therefore, wishes to view all this, must either journey through the whole world or stay in this city. For the work and toil of other folks is ever here at hand, and in excess."³⁴

The immediate impact of this urbanization, including the narrow available space for living, inevitably meant more time spent with neighbours in the pursuit of social contacts and the exchange of ideas. This also meant little time for the development of an inner life experience.

This ethos, including the style of housing, the use of public spaces and the reknown of the agora and the forum, helps us to understand urban living in the period. Coupled with the implicit rivalry between cities encouraged by Rome (to prevent smaller places from uniting together against the capitol city), this description allows us to arrive at this conclusion - no one was anonymous in the urban culture of the day. People lived as fellow-citizens and as co-labourers in unique city culture.

The second characteristic of urban life in late antiquity can be summarized in the Greek concept of "*philotimia*".

Philotimia describes the ambition or zeal of someone. In a concrete sense it can also describe the object of ambition including the position of honour or office of someone. It most often describes the superfluous abundant fashion with which something is done. Coupled with the ethos just described, *philotimia* then can be understood as the physical magnificence of imperial civilization established on sheer willingness. As Ramsay MacMullen has

³⁴Ibid.

stated about *philotimia*, "no word understood to its depths goes further to explain the Greco-Roman achievement."³⁵

Peter Brown sees evidence of this drive in the inscription to the praise of God and men, the strong competitive urges in the collective life of the city and on all levels of social life and in the candor and abrasiveness of life in the empire.³⁶ Wayne Meeks illustrates this in the use of titles for individuals. In commenting on "*oikonomos tes poleos*", cited in Romans 16:23, he writes, "One might argue that Paul would not mention the title if it were not a public office of some consequence, but that would fail to take account of the *philotimia* which was so constant a factor in the life of the Graeco-Roman city."³⁷

Two examples suffice to underscore the evidence of *philotimia* in the urban life of Late Antiquity. First, in The Epistle to Diognetus, the author describes this phenomenon in the practice of religion,

But those who think to perform sacrifices to Him with blood and fat and whole burnt offerings and to honour Him (*philotimia*) with such honours, seem to me in no way different from those who show the same respect toward deaf images; for the one class think first to make offerings to things unable to participate in the honour; the other class to One who is in need of nothing.³⁸

Second, it was in the economic injustices of a highly hierarchical society that concentrated fortunes in the hands of a few that *philotimia* became most blatant. Patronage was limited to the rich. A preoccupation with status was more and more the driving force of the aristocracy as we draw to the end of the period in question. It translated into a form of civic xenophobia.

³⁵R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974) 61 and 125.

³⁶P. Brown, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) 30-31.

³⁷Meeks, 58.

³⁸*The Epistle to Diognetus*, 3.

A.H.M. Jones, the great Cambridge social historian described this "incestuous" concentration of power in these terms...

The society of the principate was, as I see it, stratified and stable. There was of course some movement from class to class. There was a steady trickle of decurions into the equestrian and senatorial orders, but it was small; it must be remembered that the senate numbered only 600 persons and the total of the equestrian posts was still under 200 in the Severan period. A large number of prosperous plebians rose to decurionate. Soldiers might rise to the equestrian order or even the senate. But on the whole the classes were hereditary. The rich land owning families served generation after generation on the city councils."

According to the best estimates less than one per cent of the population made up these top three estates (ordo senatorius, ordo equester and ordo decurinus). It is in this context that *philotimia* prospered.

Therefore, this ethos of the city, characterized by its density and familiarity, and this *philotimia*, witnessed by obsessive drive and competition, underscore urban life in Late Antiquity. *Koinonia* was the obvious Christian response.

These forces will still be dominant regardless of the date one chooses for The Shepherd of Hermas. But a late date will be coupled with an encroaching persecution. There is not a total absence of such persecution in The Shepherd, but it is certainly not thematic as in the texts of Justin. Writing in the late fourth and fifth decade (of the second century) persecution is a recurring theme. But in The Shepherd, we have only one such reference to oppression. In VISION 3,2 we read, "What did they suffer?" say I. "Listen", saith he, "Stripes, imprisonments, great tribulations, crosses, wild beasts for the Name's Sake. Therefore to them belongs the right side of the Holiness - to them and to all who suffer for the Name."

"A. H. M. Jones, "The Caste System in Later Roman Empire," *Eirene* 8.89.

In light of the strong ethical appeal of this work and the continuity of social influences from the first century into this period, I would suggest that this work is principally written during the first decades of the second century. This would not be to deny a redaction from the period of the '40's to conform to the Muratorian Statement but this does not seem to be the main social environment considered.

How did Hermas help his readers develop a biblical theodicy? His perspective is clearly established in the beginning of the twelfth MANDATE,

...Remove from thyself all evil desire and clothe thyself in the desire which is good and holy; for clothed with this desire thou shalt hate the evil desire and shalt bridle and direct it as thou wilt...⁴⁰

This is coupled with a marvelous section in MANDATES 5 and 6 that gives us great theological insight into both the nature and the source of evil. In the former passage, three remarkable issues surface. First, evil and the Holy Spirit cannot reside in the same person,

Be thou long-suffering and understanding, and thou shalt have the mastery over all evil deeds and shalt work all righteousness. For if thou art long-suffering, the Holy Spirit that abideth in thee shall be pure, not being darkened by another evil spirit...But if any angry temper approach, for with the Holy Spirit being delicate is straitened, not having clear place and seeketh to return from the place...⁴¹

This is again reported in the following MANDATE.

Second, evil and righteousness are modified and personalized in a variety of ways. Righteousness is paralleled to attributes of long-suffering and understanding. Evil, on the other hand, is angry temper. It is bitter and useless, 'fickle, feeble and senseless'. "Together," says Hermas, "they result in a great sin."

⁴⁰*The Shepherd of Hermas*, MANDATE 12.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, MANDATE 5,1.

Third, these insights that form Hermas' perspective are brought together in a most interesting passage in MANDATE 6,2,

"Hear now," saith he, "concerning faith. There are two angels with a man, one of righteousness and one of wickedness...The angel of righteousness is delicate and bashful and gentle and tranquil...Now see the works of the angel of wickedness also. First of all, he is quick-tempered and bitter and senseless and his works are evil..."⁴²

Although this could be a precursor to an implicit dualism,⁴³ it is very easy to see the formation of an early Christian tendency. Quasten calls this passage "...the clear sighted observation regarding the spirits that sway the heart of man."⁴⁴ His comment accurately describes this context. We will need to wait for Marcion, Gnosticism and Mani for a more developed dualism.

Against this background we can consider three aspects of evil in The Shepherd: its source, its manifestations and solutions to overcome it.

THE SOURCE OF EVIL

The opening paragraph of the book (VISION 1,1) gives us a clear picture of the source of evil,

...The desire after evil entered into thine heart. Nay thinkest thou not that it is an evil deed for a righteous man, if the evil desire should enter into his heart? It is indeed a sin...⁴⁵

Here we see that evil arises in the heart of the individual as a desire. This results in 'death and captivity'. But also right from the start this is

⁴²Ibid., MANDATE 6,2.

⁴³Machielsen, 221 (note 138).

⁴⁴Quasten, 102.

⁴⁵*The Shepherd of Hermas*, VISION 1,1.

identified with sin. Here we recognize one of those principal Jewish themes that is repeated in the New Testament canon and then early Christianity.

Robert Girdlestone in his volume, Synonyms of the Old Testament, writes,

The pictorial power of the Hebrew language is seldom exhibited more clearly than in connection with the various aspects of evil... The Hebrew Bible meets us with a full acknowledgment of these manifest aspects of human suffering, and blends wrongdoing and suffering to a remarkable degree, setting forth sin in its relation to God, to society and to a man's own self, depicting it in its negative aspect as iniquity or unrighteousness and in its positive aspect as rebellion and a breach of trust. The word translated sin throughout the O.T., with very rare exceptions, is derived from the word Chatha, which originally signifies 'to miss the mark' and answers to the Greek notifying the fact that all wrong doing is a failure or a coming short of that aim which God intended all His children to reach.⁴⁶

It is also important to underscore from the text that the devil plays a significant part in evil. This is not developed thoroughly yet we do read, "But fear thou the works of the devil, for they are evil."⁴⁷

MANIFESTATIONS OF EVIL

Hermas gives a lengthy list of different actions that are identified as evil.

1. the use of the tongue VISION 2,1
2. neglect of the family VISION 2,3
3. evil transactions VISION 2,3
4. speak evil of no man MANDATE 2,1
5. slander MANDATE 2,1
6. lies MANDATE 3
7. complicity (with evil) MANDATE 4
8. concerning another's wife MANDATE 4
9. fornication MANDATE 4
10. angry temper MANDATE 5,1; 10,2
11. list of wickedness MANDATE 8,1
12. doublemindedness MANDATE 9
13. evil desire MANDATE 12
14. luxury MANDATE 12

⁴⁶R. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1897) 76.

⁴⁷*The Shepherd of Hermas*, MANDATE 7.

This list is remarkable because it at no point mentions structural (or political) evil of any sort. This would conform to the Pauline passages of the New Testament and underscores that Hermas identified the source of evil in the individual.

SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS OF EVIL

The Shepherd of Hermas, being an ethical work written within a very precise theological and social framework, is principally providing exhortations for people to live holy lives. In spite of this lengthy list of 'evils', the book is remarkably positive in helping the reader(s).

VISION 1,1 again provides the framework for Hermas' solution,

...Only be not thou careless, but take courage, and strengthen thy family. For as the smith hammering his work conquers the task which he wills, so also doth righteous discourse repeated daily conquer all evil..."

This is most certainly a reference to repentance, a theme often repeated in The Shepherd. R. Joly sees this but certainly overstates the case when he writes,

Tout au long du Pasteur, Hermas s'intéresse presque'exclusivement à la pénitence. Si vous tirez de son oeuvre des renseignements d'autre sorte, c'est en fonction de la pénitence qu'il les livre tout le reste étant secondaire à ses yeux."

We find several passages instructing the reader to overcome evil through repentance. In these parables we read,

"Ibid., VISION 1,1.

"Le Pasteur d'Hermas," *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 53 (Paris: Les Editions des Cerf, 1968) 22.

...These commandments are suitable for those who mediate repentance; for if they walk not in them, their repentance is in vain. Ye then that repent, cast away the evil doings of this world which crush you...⁵⁰

The Shepherd continues,

...But, if they repent, the evil works which they have done rise up in their hearts and then they glorify God saying that He is a just Judge and that they suffered justly each according to his doings...⁵¹

Finally, we see,

...Go and tell all men to repent and they shall live unto God; for the Lord in his compassion sent me to give repentance to all. Though some of them do not deserve it for their deeds; but being long-suffering, the Lord willeth them that were called through His Son to be saved...⁵²

These acts of repentance must also be accompanied by other deeds of righteousness if one is to scorn evil. First, one needs to follow Continence, the second of seven Christian employments, "Whoever then shall follow her, becometh happy in his life, for he shall refrain from all evil deeds, believing that if he refrain from evil desire, he shall inherit eternal life."⁵³

Second, "Be long-suffering and understanding and thou shalt have the mastery over all evil deeds and shalt work all righteousness." This forms part of a larger series of exhortations for the believer desiring to overcome evil. By "not being temperate" in these matters the person accomplishes great righteousness.

Third, we see a negative exhortation, "...it behoved thee as a servant of God to walk in truth and no complicity with evil should abide with the Spirit of

⁵⁰*The Shepherd of Hermas*, MANDATE 6,1.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, MANDATE 6,3.

⁵²*Ibid.*, PARABLE 8,11.

⁵³*Ibid.*, VISION 3,8.

truth..."⁵⁴ Hermas then continues, "If thou keep these things, and from henceforth speak nothing but truth, thou shalt be able to secure life for thyself."⁵⁵

And finally, Hermas uses the discipline of fasting to appeal to his reader's task,

...This then is the way that thou shalt keep this fast. First of all keep thyself from every evil and every evil desire and purify thy heart from all vanities of this world. If thou keep these things, this fast shall be perfect for thee. And thus shalt thou do...⁵⁶

CONCLUSION

Far from a theoretical endeavour, theodicy, in the urban world of the writers of The Epistle to Diognetus and The Shepherd of Hermas, is an active endeavour of Christians in community responding because of conversion to the realities of the fallen city. Although Diognetus deals more concretely with an urban description, the Shepherd portrays the evil influences in great detail. The former describes corporate action, the latter repentance and individual action to withstand the evil world. In both works evil can be overcome.

Thus, as we move historically toward the Augustinian formulations, we see from the first decades of the early church that the servant of God who seeks healing in and for a damaged city, must find his\her focus in God's work in the soul through Jesus Christ.

⁵⁴Ibid., MANDATE 3.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., PARABLE 5,3.

CHAPTER FIVE

IRENÆUS OF LYON

Coupled with the general validity of the observations of Machielsen concerning evil in the Apostolic Period, we have seen that the urban context shaped the theodicy of the writer of The Epistle to Diognetus and The Shepherd of Hermas. These two very different texts paint pictures of a church wrestling with the various expressions of evil through a life experience in Jesus Christ and fellowship in the community.

As we come to the next segment of Late Antiquity, we turn to Irenaeus of Lyon. He lived in the second half of the second century (probably 140- 202). Having migrated from Smyrna in Asia Minor to the West, he became bishop of Lyon in 177, according to Eusebius. There is some question concerning his death. J.T. Nielsen documents the possibilities of a martyr's death in either 202 or 203.¹ Quasten disputes this claim.² Eusebius is silent on the issue.

It is not difficult to appreciate the immensity of Irenaeus' contributions to the development of Christian thought. The adjectives describing his work illustrate that it easily surpassed that of any church leader of his time. He was "by far the most important of the theologians of the second century."³ Various comments illustrate this agreement with Quasten's comments. Henry Chadwick writes, "With Irenaeus the shape of Christian theology became stable

¹J. T. Nielsen, *Adam and Christ in the Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 1968) 1.

²J. Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1983) 228.

³*Ibid.*, 298.

and coherent."⁴ Gustav Wingren sees Irenaeus' contributions on a unique plane. He writes,

If, however, we regard the theologians of the Church as being in their various periods, our guides to the Bible, or interpreters of Biblical theology, then we must assign to Irenaeus a place of great importance. Indeed as far as a theological interpretation of man is concerned, it would be difficult to find anyone to surpass Irenaeus either then or in the later periods.⁵

In his work, Detection and Overthrow of the Pretended but False Gnosis, usually known (and hereafter referred to) as Against Heresies, we get a clear picture of Irenaeus the theologian. His deep concern for the pursuit of true knowledge underscores his life and work,

It is therefore better, as I have said, that one should have no knowledge whatever of any one reason why a single thing in creation has been made, but should believe in God and continue in His love, than that, puffed up through knowledge of this kind, he should fall away from that love which is the life of man; and that he should search after no other knowledge except the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was crucified for us, than that by subtle questions and hairsplitting expressions he should fall into impiety.⁶

Later in his work, Irenaeus describes this individual as "a spiritual disciple," who pursues this true knowledge. This person has received the Spirit of God, "judges all men but is himself judged by no man," has full faith in one God Almighty and the Son of God and "a firm belief in the Spirit of God"⁷ who gives us this knowledge of the truth. Then in an oft-quoted text, he adds,

True knowledge is that which consists in the doctrine of the apostles and the ancient contribution of the church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the Body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place and has come even unto us, being guarded and

⁴H. Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967) 80.

⁵G. Wingren, *Man and the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959) XII.

⁶St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 2,26 (hereafter A.H.).

⁷Ibid., 4.33.

preserved without any forging of Scriptures by a very complete system of doctrine and neither receiving addition nor suffering curtailment in the truths which she believes; and it consists in reading the Word of God without falsification and a lawful and diligent exposition in harmony with the Scriptures, both without danger and without blasphemy; and above all it consists in the pre-eminent gift of love which is more precious than knowledge, more glorious than prophecy which excels all other gifts of God.⁸

But what was "true knowledge" in the realm of Irenaeus' theodicy? How does he understand the problem? What does he offer as solution? What part does evil play in his theodicy? And most importantly for this study, what influence did the context have on the formulation of his thought?

Lyon, although a small city by most accounts was, nonetheless, a Roman colony. The presence of the military and a Christian bishop implied the presence of the Greek language and culture. Interestingly, Irenaeus apologizes for his Greek style⁹ in the preface of Against Heresies. Does this mean he spoke Celtic or Latin and had lost the intricacies of the written language? Fox thinks not. "Irenaeus was only making a lettered man's excuse for his literary style."¹⁰

Two issues would have influenced the lives of Christians in the city. The martyrdoms of 177 were ever-present. The image of Blandina was graphic,

She seemed to hang there, in the form of a cross and by her concerted prayer she aroused great eagerness in those who were struggling too, for they saw in their struggle and with their physical sight, him who was crucified on their behalf in the person of their sister Blandina.¹¹

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., PREFACE 1.3.

¹⁰Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986) 285.

¹¹Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 5.1.

Secondly, the lack of privacy in a small community fostered the informal spread of the faith. The presence of an articulate bishop would foster the circulation of good news and the discussion of relevant issues.

Both Peter Brown and Robin Lane Fox facilitate our understanding of the urban ethos of a city like Lyon. Although the factors identified in Rome (in the fourth chapter) would have manifested themselves in this colony, it is important to underscore this "severe lack of privacy and a constant circulation" as prime dimensions of urban life at this time. Brown can then state,

To create a culture where highly competitive men were nonetheless made constantly aware of what they shared with their peers and with their local communities, was the singular achievement of the Antonine age.¹²

But, in this context, the theodicy of the church of the late second century was also shaped because of the rise of Gnosticism. Peme Perkins in The Gnostic Dialogue, gives us very relevant insight into the socio-contextual influences of this movement. The proliferation of religions, the revival of Platonism, the use of superstition and the mystery cults, undoubtedly influenced the rise of Gnostic expressions. The social question of these decades moves from one of how people should not "divert" themselves (particularly in Christian literature) to very strict, well articulated statements of lifestyle. J.D. Davies comments,

Leisure activity was to be characterized by a similar restraint (i.e., dress codes). There was to be no gambling or dice-playing; instead Christians were to gather for meditation or sit at home and read the Scriptures while women spun the wool. Ampitheatres and theatres were forbidden; riotous parties were to be shunned. In the world but not of it, the Christian was to bear the mark of Christ by his self-denial.¹³

¹²Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (London: Farber, 1967) 38.

¹³J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965) 79.

(If this was the position of the Christians, one can quickly draw ideas as to what society at large must have been like.) But before we are too quick to interpret all these contextual factors as signs of increasing irrationalism in an increasingly religious era, Perkins' perspective is important. She writes,

...These people were not in a position to suffer a "decline of rationalism", since the leisured pursuit of philosophic learning had never been theirs to enjoy.¹⁴

But it is Kenneth Surin who clearly summarizes Irenaeus' thought in its context in these words,

The proper, historically constituted context of Irenaeus' ideas was one in which the early church's dominant concern was the need to transmit the primitive Apostolic faith in all its purity and wholeness to the pagan who had resolved to become a Christian.¹⁵

In this context, a dozen or more Gnostic sects arose in active debate with the early church. The size of the movement is virtually unknown, but we can speculate from the enormity of the early church writings that it was enough of a threat to be dealt with directly. Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian wrote extensively to counteract its influence. Both Clement of Alexandria and Origen saw Gnosticism through a much different light and encouraged their students to pursue true gnosis. In the conclusion of The Gnostic Gospels, Pagels attempts to interpret this conflict,

We can see, then, how conflicts arose in the formation of Christianity between those restless, inquiring people who marked out a solitary path of self discovery and the institutional framework that gave to the great majority of people religious sanction and ethical direction for their daily lives. Adapting for its own purpose the model of Roman political and military organization, and gaining in the 4th century imperial support, orthodox Christianity grew increasingly stable and enduring. Gnostic Christianity proved no match for the orthodox faith.¹⁶

¹⁴P. Perkins, *The Gnostic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1980) 7.

¹⁵K. Surin, *Theology and The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 15.

¹⁶E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981) 178-179.

Perkins rightly dismisses this over-generalization of the reason for the conflict as "a product of modern thought" and concludes her study of conflict with an interesting sociological perspective based on her literacy thesis,

Gnostics lagged behind their orthodox counterparts in adapting to the larger cultural changes of the 3rd and following centuries that demanded reshaping of religious traditions. Whatever its value as a heresiological weapon, the emergence of a canon responded to a deeper shift toward the priority of written over oral traditions...Insofar as Gnostics stayed with the more amorphous religious perception of the oral tradition of the 2nd century, they would lose their place as deeper interpretation, because that place was coming to be taken by another mode of apprehending the tradition, that of the great theological symbols and syntheses of the 3rd and following centuries.¹⁷

In this context, Irenaeus wrote against his gnostic adversaries. His theodicy was shaped by two issues in Gnostic thought: determinism and "gnosis".

In the initial chapters of Against Heresies, Irenaeus describes Valentinian Gnosticism. He recounts as follows, their description of mankind,

They conceive then of three kinds of men, spiritual, material and animal represented by Cain, Abel and Seth. These three natures are no longer found in one person, but constitute various kinds of men. The material goes as a matter of course, into corruption. The animal, if it makes choice of the better part, finds repose in the intermediate place; but if the worse, it too shall pass into destruction. But they assert that the spiritual principles which have been sown by Achamoth, being righteous souls (because when given forth by her they were yet but weak), at last attaining to perfection shall be given as brides to the angels of the Saviour, while their animal souls of necessity rest forever with the Demiurge in the intermediate place. And again subdividing the animal souls themselves, they say that some are by nature good and others by nature evil. The good are those who become capable of receiving the spiritual seed; the evil by nature are those who are never able to receive the seed.¹⁸

From this quote we see the deterministic motif within an underlying redemptive scenario. Gnosticism is ultimately concerned with salvation, but here Irenaeus has placed it in a particular setting. Kurt Rudolph, in his classic work, Gnosis, interprets this admirably,

¹⁷Perkins, 205-206.

¹⁸A. H., 1.7,5.

...The whole world view of late antiquity, with its idea of the power of the fate (Greek heirmenies) which dominates the gods, the world and men. It becomes a prison from which there is no escape, unless the liberating act of the transcendent God and his helpers opens up a way in which man (strictly only a small part of man, namely the divine spark) can escape. Here the gnostic doctrine of redemption (soteriology) has its roots.¹⁹

Perkins gives a very lucid description of this from her literary analysis of Gnostic texts,

The problem of determinism in Gnostic anthropology arises when gnostic thinkers try to give an account of why people fail to respond to their preaching. The passage on the various types of souls in the Apocrypha of John distinguishes between people who accept gnosis and the spirit of life immediately and those who do not, the souls of the former become stronger than the antimimnon spirit...²⁰

Nothing could have stood more contrary to Irenaeus' concept of God the Father. In our description of Irenaeus' theodicy we will see how he reacts to this iron clad point of view.

Second, Irenaeus' viewpoint is shaped by the Gnostic teaching of "gnosis." Throughout the first book of Against Heresies, we get a glimpse of the significance Irenaeus attributes to this premise within the Gnostic movement,

Such then is the account they give of what took place within the Pleroma, such the calamities that flowed from the passion which seized the Aeon who has been named, and who has within a little of perishing by being absorbed in the universal substance, through her inquisitive searching after the Father; such the consolidation of the Aeon from her condition of agony by Horos and Stauros and Lytotes and Carpistes and Horothetes and Megagoges. They tell us however, that this knowledge has not been openly divulged because all are not capable of receiving it, but has been mystically revealed by the Saviour.²¹

He goes on,

They further hold that the consummation of all things will take place when all that is spiritual has been formed and perfected by Gnosis (knowledge); and by this they mean spiritual men who have attained to

¹⁹K. Rudolph, *Gnosis* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1983) 58.

²⁰Perkins, 182.

²¹A. H., 1.3,1.

the perfect knowledge of God, and been initiated into these mysteries by Achamotz. And they represent themselves to be these persons.²²

And we see in a further text,

...They tell us that it is necessary for us whom they call animal men, and describe as being of the world, to practice continence and good works, that by means we may attain at length to the intermediate habitation but to them who are called "the spiritual and the perfect" such a course of conduct is not at all necessary. For it is not conduct of any kind which leads into the Pleroma, but the seed sent forth, hence in a feeble, immature state, and here through to perfection.²³

Undoubtedly, Irenaeus understood the essence of Valentinianism. In the Gnostic tract, The Gospel of Truth, we read, "If one has knowledge, he gets what belongs to him and draws to himself."²⁴ Rudolph defines this,

There is first of all the idea of 'gnosis' itself, a word which derives from Greek and means 'knowledge'...The Church Fathers, above all Irenaeus, took up the expression as an appropriate characterization and set over against it the "true Gnosis" of the Church...They were not aiming at any ideal philosophical knowledge nor any knowledge of an intellectual or theoretical kind but a knowledge which had at the same time a liberating and redeeming effect...It is a knowledge given by revelation.²⁵

This aspect of Gnosticism must be contrasted with Irenaeus' statements on Scripture, the apostolic succession and the rule of faith. The foundation of faith was to be found nowhere else. In the last four books of Against Heresies, Irenaeus consistently uses this in his attack,

That God is the Creator of the world is accepted even by those very persons who in many ways speak against Him and yet acknowledge Him, styling Him the Creator and an angel not to mention that all the Scriptures call out...For the present, however, that proof that is derived from those who allege doctrines opposite to ours is of itself sufficient - all men in fact consenting to this truth: the ancients on their part preserving with special care from the traditions of the first

²²Ibid., 1.6,1.

²³Ibid., 1.6,4.

²⁴J. M. Robinson, *The Gospel of Truth in the Nag Hammandi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988) 46.

²⁵Rudolph, 55.

formed man. The Universal Church, moreover, through the whole world has received this tradition from the apostles.²⁶

This principle is also seen in a later text,

If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ and a foreshadowing of the new calling...Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church - these who as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles... But (it is also incumbent) to hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession...²⁷

G.W.H. Lampe and Perkins rightly perceive the impact that Irenaeus' approach had. He was creating an authoratative basis for dialogue. Lampe wrote,

...The 'canon' which Irenaeus is so fond of producing as a main weapon of orthodoxy was a way of preventing this from being done (i.e., reading whatever he pleases out of The Bible) and maintaining no system could rightly claim scriptural authority if it contravened this essentially scriptural role.²⁸

Perkins observes,

The brilliance of Irenaeus' counterattack was to see that such arguments (of the Gnostics) have no conclusions and to move the basis of authority into new ground. This move required that the teaching community be associated with a smaller group which had come to have responsibility for Christian churches. It also required what they were to teach to be regulated by a fixed normative text that would be subject to certain standards of interpretation.²⁹

Because of the all important aspect of revelation and call to (have) "gnosis", Gnosticism never placed much emphasis on its teachers, leaders or holy men. (In this respect we can see that it is a religious phenomenon firmly planted in the time period under question.) Although it is easy to identify certain names for Gnostic movements from the names of certain individuals, little is known of these people. When one considers that Valentinianism was the most

²⁶A. H., 2.9,1.

²⁷Ibid., 4.26,1.

²⁸G. W. H. Lampe, "Christian Theology in the Patristic Period," *A History of Christian Doctrine*, H. Cunliffe Jones, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978; 43.

²⁹Perkins, 203.

influential and extensive form of Gnostic teaching and the most attacked by the heresiologists, it is surprising that we know so little of Valentinus. Piecing together various historians' facts, one can conclude certain aspects of his person. He lived about 150 years after Christ, and lived for several years in Rome.

Remnants of his personal writings are few. George MacRae, in his introduction to The Gospel of Truth in the Nag Hammadi Library, writes, "Some scholars have even suggested that Valentinus himself may have been the author of the tractate."³⁰ Of the six tractates in the library generally considered as those written within the Valentinian system, this is one which scholars speculate as the creation of the founder. Because of his influence, we can readily agree with Quispel when he says this is "a deplorable situation." His followers comprised the Italic school of which Ptolemaeus and Heracleon are the two most common names associated and the Oriental school to which Theodotus belonged.

Yet in spite of this lack of information regarding his life and writings, literally reams have been penned detailing his philosophy and its development. Keeping in mind what has already been said about Gnosticism, it would be important to detail Valentinianism as a system.

Not all Gnostic groups saw a metaphysical duality or plurality of gods. Although this is a common feature of much of Gnosticism, certain Valentinian writings see it very differently. The Tripartate Tractate and two older Valentinian sources also bear this out. In A Valentinian Exposition (22, 1-30) we read,

[...] enter [...] the abundance [...] me [...] those who [...] I will speak] my mystery [to those who are] mine and [to those who will be mine]. Moreover, it is those who [have known him who] is, the Father, that [is, the Root] of the All, the [ineffable One who] dwells in the

³⁰J. M. Robinson, "A Valentinian Exposition" XI 22, 1-39, 38.

Monad. [He dwells alone] in silence, [and silence is tranquility since, after all] he was a Monad, and no one [was] before him.³¹

In The Interpretation of Knowledge (XI, 9,25), we read, "Now this is his teaching: Do not call out to a father upon earth. Your Father who is in heaven is one."

Without subscribing to her interpretation of why Valentinian Gnostics were rejected for this seemingly orthodox doctrine, we can readily see that Pagels³² has perceived a very interesting phenomenon amongst Valentinians at large. Even as one compares the development of this doctrine from Valentinus to Ptolemaeus and then to the Italic school, as Quispel has done, there are some differences, but amazing agreement,³³

<u>Valentinus</u>	<u>Ptolemaeus</u>	<u>Italic School</u>
1. Deity is conceived (Iren. 1, 11, 1).	A tendency to stress the unity of God (Iren. 1, 8, 5). Together with the Holy Spirit, Christ emanates (Tert. adv. Valent. 11).	God is one as a dyad (Iren. 1, Hippol. VI,29). Together with the Holy Spirit Christ emanates (Iren. 1, 2, 5; Hippol. VI,31).
2. The inner life of God is a gradual emanation of the Son (aeons) and the Holy Spirit from the Father (Iren. 1, 11, 1).		

(Irenaeus himself commented,

They say that in the invisible and ineffable heights above there exists a certain perfect, pre-existent Aeon, whom they call Before-the-beginning, Prenatal-father and Abyss...He is invisible and incomprehensible, eternal and begotten and he remained throughout innumerable cycles of ages in profound serenity and quiescence.³⁴)

³¹Ibid., 39.

³²Pagels, 37.

³³G. Quispel, *Gnostic Studies 1* (Istanbul: Leiden, 1974) 28.

³⁴A. H., 1.1,1.

The dyad mentioned in Adversus Haereses (1, 11, 1) and A Valentinian Exposition (22, 25) is now referred to as Thought which existed alongside this pre-existent Aeon.

In the section on the development of the Pleroma, Jonas gives the most explicit description of the differences amongst Valentinians on the nature of the Only Begotten. From this we learn that no consensus existed amongst the various schools as to "whether the Fore-Father or Abyss was originally alone or was matched from the outset with Silence..." This, in part, helps to explain why Irenaeus could often describe them as wolves.

From this departure point, various authors will give descriptions of the Valentinian cosmology and speculation of the aeons. We gather much of this from Irenaeus and also Tertullian in Adversus Valentinus.

Furthermore, two important aspects of the Valentinian system should be added at this point. First, regarding the person of Christ, The Gospel of Truth states,

Indeed they all went about searching for the one from whom it (pl.) had come forth, and the all was inside of him, the incomprehensible, inconceivable one who is superior to every thought...Ignorance of the Father brought about anguish and terror...This [is] the gospel of the one who is searched for, which [was] revealed to those who are perfect through the mercies of the Father - the hidden mystery, Jesus the Christ. Through it he enlightened those who were in darkness. Out of oblivion he enlightened them, he showed (them) a way.³⁵

His actual humanity became a secondary issue. He might have appeared to mankind as flesh and blood, but ultimately, only those with higher insight perceived that he, as the divine God, was not incarnate. It was inconceivable for him to 'come in the flesh'. But it is important to realize that Valentinianism did place an emphasis on the redemptive activity of Jesus Christ.

³⁵Robinson, *Gospel of Truth*, 40.

Secondly, the salvation of mankind is described,

Those whose name he knew in advance were called at the end so that the one who has knowledge is the one whose name the Father has uttered. For he whose name has not been spoken is ignorant. Indeed how is one to hear if his name has not been called? For he who is ignorant until the end is a creature of oblivion and he will vanish along with it. If not, how is it that these miserable ones have no name (how is it that) they do not have the call? Therefore, if one has knowledge, he is from above. If he is called, he hears, he answers, and he turns to him who is calling him and ascends to him. And he knows in what manner he is called. Having knowledge, he does the will of the one who called him, he wishes to be pleasing to him, he receives rest.³⁶

Although the writings placed much emphasis on cosmology and aeons, Gnostics were ultimately concerned with salvation.

Within the cosmological sphere, then, these soteriological and Christological phenomena transpire in a fashion described by Hans Jonas,

So far the events described have been confined to the Pleroma, but now interest moves to the Kenoma, the region void of spiritual being, into which the passion of Wisdom had been cast. In pity for this fall, Christ extended himself through limit or Cross (Stauros) and gave her personal form with the name of Achamoth, which is to be derived from the Hebrew word for wisdom. Next Achamoth produced the demiurge and his 6 angels, thus bringing into existence a second and lower Ogdoad, which mirrors the superior and the demiurge, in his turn, created the 7 heavens, the lower world and man, in whom, unknown to their maker Achamoth deposited a spiritual seed. It is this pneumatic element in man that yearns for redemption, and it was to liberate it from its bondage to matter that the Saviour descended from the Pleroma upon the psychic Christ at his baptism and brought the perfect knowledge that ensures salvation to those pneumatics who possess the seed, to those psychic who are capable of conversion, but not to the hylic who are doomed to perish.³⁷

IRENAEUS' THEODICY

But how does Irenaeus' perceptions of gnostic determinism and their idea of knowledge (gnosis) directly influence his theodicy? These issues forced him

³⁶Ibid., 42.

³⁷H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 2nd edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963) 176.

to articulate the essence of a theology grounded in an understanding of God the Creator and an unwavering confidence in the rule of faith.

John Hick, in his Evil and the God of Love, associates this church father with a system he postulates as an Irenaean theodicy.³⁸ Considering Hick's rejection of many of Irenaeus' theological positions, including the sinfulness of humanity and the Incarnation, I think we would be wiser to listen to Hick's hesitations in using Irenaeus' name than his final decision to appropriate his name for a modern theodicy. Surin is correct in criticizing this purely philosophical approach.

But if we are not dealing with a "philosophical Irenaean theodicy" what then does this great church father teach concerning evil and its resolution? The closest we come to a definition of evil with Irenaeus is found in Book 4 of Against Heresies,

Man has received the knowledge of good and evil. It is good to obey God and to believe in Him and to keep His commandments and this is the life of man, as not to obey God is evil and this is his death.³⁹

A somewhat parallel statement is found in Proof of the Apostolic Preaching. Here the definition is contextualized,

And the sin that was wrought through the tree was undone by the obedience of the tree, obedience to God whereby the Son of man was nailed to the tree, destroying the knowledge of evil and bringing in and conferring the knowledge of good; and evil is disobedience to God as obedience to God is good.⁴⁰

Obviously such a definition flows from his understanding of God the Creator. Throughout Against Heresies we see marvelous expositions of the Creator's character but the most eloquent statement is from The Proof,

³⁸J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Glasgow: McMillan, 1966) 221.

³⁹A. H., 4.39,1.

⁴⁰Proof, 8.

And the Father is called by the Spirit Most High, and Almighty and Lord of Hosts, that we may learn that God is indeed such, that is, creator of heaven and earth and the whole world, and maker of angels and men, and Lord of all, who upholds all things, and by whom everything is sustained; merciful, compassionate and most tender, good, just, God of all, both of Jews and of Gentiles and of the faithful. But to the faithful He is as a Father, for in the end of times He has opened the testament of adoption of sons.⁴¹

Rather than being caught in a deterministic system of "those capable of receiving the spiritual seed" versus "the evil by nature are those who are never able to receive that seed", Irenaeus draws the discussion to obedience to a merciful God who has "opened the testament" to humanity and therefore requires obedience.

It becomes obvious that it is at this juncture that the contextual factors and theological perspectives come together. Gnosticism in Lyon and its scripture-twisting⁴² are the context for Irenaeus to articulate and defend the God of Scripture. As we have already seen, Gnostic determinism was instrumental in helping him develop an orthodox perspective. But now we see that his whole theme becomes the framework for an exposition of the character of God. J.T. Nielson, writes,

The whole *Adversus Haereses* is dominated by the main theme of there being one sole God, the Creator who is also the father of the one and only Jesus Christ.⁴³

He adds,

Whereas on the one hand Irenaeus uses the "unmasking" and refuting of the Gnostic views as a means of tracing and demonstrating why and in what the Gnostics are wrong, the method has on the other hand also influenced him in building up a theology of his own. The main concern of Irenaeus is the unity of the Creator God...⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid., 8.

⁴²A. H., 1.9,4.

⁴³Nielson, 47.

⁴⁴Ibid., 56.

God is against evil⁴⁵ and as we shall see He calls His people to similar action. Irenaeus presents a clear picture of the source of evil. The Devil, created by God,⁴⁶ ("...strong, but not absolutely so but as in comparison with us..."⁴⁷) is viewed as the cause of Man's fall and as the author of evil,

For he (Satan) thus rendered (man) more ungrateful towards his Creator, observed the love which God had towards man and blinded his mind not to perceive what is worthy of God, comparing himself with and judging himself equal to God.⁴⁸

In both Against Heresies and Proof of the Apostolic Preaching,⁴⁹ the Evil One is described this way. In the last book of Against Heresies we see his destruction.⁵⁰ Wingren states,

In Irenaeus every page and almost every sentence conveys the idea of a struggle, a never-ending contest, between the two active powers, God and Satan, and to make any assertion about man, without taking into account the fact that he is caught up in the midst of this contest is meaningless.⁵¹

It would be an overstatement here to speak of an implied dualism (Wingren does at times seem to imply this),⁵² because of the clear statements concerning God's limitations on Satan's dominance. We see very clearly from Irenaeus' statements that his perspectives are based on his view of scripture and tradition. In his clearest exposition on this matter he quotes five times from the Old and New Testaments.⁵³

⁴⁵for example 4.28,1. and 5.29,1.

⁴⁶A. H., 4.41,2.

⁴⁷Ibid., 3.8,2.

⁴⁸Ibid., 3.20,1. (see also 5.23,1.)

⁴⁹Proof, 16.

⁵⁰A. H., 5,21.

⁵¹Wingren, 53.

⁵²Ibid., 49.

⁵³A. H., 3.8,2 and 3.

But alongside of this we see Irenaeus' positing man's free-will as a source of evil,

This expression (of our Lord), "How often would I have gathered thy children together and thou wouldest not," set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free (agent) from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul to obey the behests of God voluntarily and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will (toward us) is present with him continually. And therefore does he give good counsel to all. And in man as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice...But since all men are of the same nature, able to hold fast to do what is good; and on the other hand having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it...All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man and at the same time the counsel which God conveys to Him, and seeks to turn us away from the (sin of) unbelief against Him without, however, in anyway coercing us.⁵⁴

This is an essential dimension of Irenaeus' perspective on the creation of humanity. And yet as we saw with Satan, God overcomes the evil induced by free will,

For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality and the corruptible by incorruptibility and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God having received the knowledge of good and evil.⁵⁵

This picture of the source of evil is situated in Irenaeus' view of the sovereignty of God. He is unwilling to retract on this at all. In a rebuttal to the Gnostic notion of created order implied by angels, he writes,

If however (the things referred to were done) not against His will, but with His concurrence and knowledge, as some (of these men) think, the angels, or the former of the world (whoever that may have been)) will no longer be the causes of that formation, but the will of God...With justice, therefore, according to an analagous process of reasoning, the Father of all will be declared the Former of this world and not the angels, nor any other (so-called) former of the world, other than He who was its Author and had formerly been the cause of the preparation for a creation of this kind.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Ibid., 4.37,1, 2, and 3.

⁵⁵Ibid., 4.38,4.

⁵⁶Ibid., 2.2,3.

Or again, he wrote, (in the passive tense), "Longsuffering therefore was God when man became a defaulter..."⁵⁷

Furthermore, there is no mention of physical or political evil.

Finally, according to Irenaeus, what was the extent of evil? In the preface to Book 4 he writes,

But now since last times (come upon us) evil is spread abroad among men, which not only renders them apostate, but many machinations does (the devil) raise up blasphemers against the Creator, namely by all heresies already mentioned.⁵⁸

And yet Irenaeus does establish the limits of evil. It does not cover innocent children nor the "learning one's infirmities by endurance."⁵⁹ He always points out the eschatological victory over this evil.

And here, Irenaeus gives his readers the clearest instructions. Overcoming evil involves *serving God*,

But He has increased and widened those laws which are natural and noble, and common to all, granting to men largely and without grudging by means of adoption to know God the Father and to love Him with the whole heart and to follow His word unswervingly while they abstain not only from evil deeds but even from the desire after them.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Ibid., 3.20,1.

⁵⁸Ibid., 4. Preface 4.

⁵⁹Ibid., 5.3,1.

⁶⁰Ibid., 4.16,5.

living properly,

...so is also our walk in life required to be more circumspect when we are directed not merely to abstain from evil actions and from idle words and empty talk and scurrilous language.⁶¹

and obeying church leaders,

From all such persons therefore, it behoves us to keep aloof, but to adhere to those who as I have already observed do hold the doctrines of the apostles and who, together with the order of priesthood display sound speech and blameless conduct for the confirmation and correction of others.⁶²

But all of these actions must be set in the Irenaeus framework of his doctrine of recapitulation. Rooted in his theology of history, a perspective that understands four decisive covenants given to humanity, he states,

For this reason were four principal covenants given to the human race; one prior to the deluge, under Adam; the second, that after the deluge under Noah; the third, the giving of the law under Moses; the fourth, that which renovates man and sums up all things in itself by means of the gospel, raising and bearing men upon its wings into the heavenly kingdom.⁶³

This last covenant is then the articulation of the recapitulation (ἀνακεφαλαιώσις) in cosmic terms with deeply spiritual implications.

...but following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did through His transcendent love, become what we are that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.⁶⁴

The incarnation then leads to redemption, a profound contrast between the disobedient Adam and the obedient Christ,

For the Lord having been born 'the First-begotten of the dead', and receiving into His bosom the ancient fathers has regenerated them into

⁶¹Ibid., 4.28,2.

⁶²Ibid., 4.26,4.

⁶³Ibid., 3.11,8.

⁶⁴Ibid., 5. Preface.

the life of God, He having been made Himself the beginning of those that live as Adam became the beginning of those who die.⁶⁵

Therefore, Irenaeus can describe Christ's work as a "gathering together all things to Himself." As in super-celestial, spiritual and invisible things, this Christ will then have all supremacy and draw all of life to Himself.

J.N.D. Kelly sees this as "the grand theme" to explain Christ's work of redemption. Yet we must not lose sight of the contextual fact that this was Irenaeus' answer to the gnostic perspectives and ultimately his theodicy. As one participates in the work of Christ, through the incarnation and the cross, one is united in the Spirit, experiencing His new creation.

The recapitulation also includes looking to a new city. Irenaeus, the Bishop of a city, with great textual specificity, dealing with forces in his urban context, can look forward to what will happen as true reversal of the world's system,

... 'But the Jerusalem, which is above is free, which is mother of us all.' He does not say this with any thought of an erratic Aeon, or of any other power which departed from the Pleroma or of the Prunicus but of the Jerusalem which has been delineated on God's hands.⁶⁶

Evil is overcome in recapitulation.

⁶⁵Ibid., 3.22,4.

⁶⁶Ibid., 5.35,2.

CHAPTER SIX

ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

St. Athanasius' Day is celebrated on the 15th of May each year. In Egypt, the rich tradition of this great patriarch is celebrated with the singing of this hymn,

- A. The firm steersman. The good fighter. The victorious in the battles. The Lamp Which shone.
- B. The herald of Orthodoxy is Athanasius the Apostolic. The teacher of the reasoning flock of the Christ.
- C. The upright doctrines struck the heart(s) of the heretics: Like a two-edged Sword: by the power of the Trinity.
- D. Every knee bowed unto the Lord. Every tongue Praises Him. The glory of God Spread forth: filled the face of the inhabited world.
- E. In like manner we exalt thee: with David, the Singer: for thou art the priest for ever: after the order of Mel-Chiz-edek.
- F. Hail to thee O great Patriarch - our holy father abba Athanasius: whose holy teaching enlightened our minds.
- G. Blessed art thou, indeed: our holy father the Patriarch abba Athanasius the Apostolic, the beloved of the Christ.
- H. Entreat the Lord on our behalf: our holy father abba Athanasius, the beloved of the Christ, that He might forgive us our sins.¹

Such a doxology underscores the greatness of this man who left a great impact upon the church, not only of his day but on the centuries to follow. In the earliest of times, he was known as "the pillar of the church" and the "Father of Orthodoxy." Harnack renders an equally admirable modern acclamation.²

¹C. Kannengiesser, ed. *Politique et Théologie Chez Athanase d'Alexandria* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974) 19.

²Arnold von Harnack as quoted in C. Kannengiesser, ed.

Athanasius was born in the last years of the third century. Both Quasten³ and Davies⁴ place his birth in 295. In a lengthy note in his Prolegomena, Archibald Robertson defends 298 as the year of his birth. He explains, "His parents, moreover, were living after the year 358 allowing them fourscore years at that date, we find in 298 a reasonable date for the birth of their son."⁵ From his writings we catch very specific glimpses of his life. At the conclusion of Incarnation of the Word, he wrote,

For they were spoken and written by God, through men who spoke of God. But we impart of what we have learned from inspired teachers who have been conversant with them, who have also become martyrs for the deity of Christ, to your zeal for learning in turn.⁶

In Life of Anthony, we learn, "...I was his attendant for a long time and poured water on his hands..."⁷ (Although the specific rendering of this text is difficult to translate, this translation is widely accepted.) We see from his writings, a very keen theological mind and an ardent desire to contend for the faith.

Certainly his greatest contributions are Christological in nature. Because of the Arian crisis, he articulated the clearest statement, to this date, on the deity of the Son. Ekkehard Muhlenberg even goes so far as to say,

...Au niveau de l'expérience générale, Athanase reconnaît une contradiction destructrice entre la vérité et la bonté de Dieu, et c'est pourquoi il établit la nécessité de la christologie comme thème propre de la théologie chrétienne. Athanas maintient que le théologien chrétien

³J. Quasten, *Patrology III* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1983) 20.

⁴J. G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965) 16.

⁵A. Robertson, "Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria," The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series, IV, ed. by Schaff and Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) lxxxv.

⁶*Incarnation of the Word* 56.2.

⁷*Life of Anthony*, Introduction.

⁸Robertson, 195.

ne peut répondre aux questions philosophiques au sujet de Dieu que sur la seule base de la christologie.⁹

This is also coupled with other significant contributions. In Athanasius, we have one of the first complete listings of the books of the New Testament canon.¹⁰ (In speaking of these books, he called them "these fountains of salvation."¹¹) As well his Life of Anthony opened up both a new form of literature¹² and experience for the early church.

But Athanasius made a very valid contribution to the development of the early Christian response to the problem of evil. Coming at a new social stage in the history of the church, his theodicy is an important development in the understanding of the doctrine. In this chapter we will seek to explore how Athanasius understood both the complexity of the issue and its resolution in the Christian worldview. We will specifically examine his earliest works, Against the Heathen (Contre Gentes) and Incarnation of the Word (de Incarnatione Verbe Dei) and the theodicy therein articulated.

Although there is much question as to the date of these works,¹³ there is little question as to their significance. Robertson sees them as "...the first attempt to construct a scientific system of the Christian religion upon certain fundamental ideas of God and world, sin and redemption; and they form the ripe fruit of the positive apology in the Greek church."¹⁴ In a lengthy introduction Kannengiesser states,

⁹Ekkehard Muhlenberg as quoted in C. Kannengiesser, ed., 213.

¹⁰Letter xxxix (For. 367), Second Series, vol. IV, 551-552.

¹¹Ibid., 552.

¹²Quasten, 23.

¹³Various authors plead for two dates in particular. Kannengiesser in his article "La Bible et la Crise Arienne" in *Le Monde grec ancien et la Bible* pleads for 337. Quasten and Robertson say 318. As it is secondary to the purpose of this paper, I will not pursue the issue.

¹⁴Robertson, 2.

...L'oeuvre, d'un abord facile mais d'un contenu riche et dense, annonce l'homme, l'auteur et le pasteur qui sera Athanase, contre vents et marées, à travers toutes les tempêtes doctrinales ou administratives qui viendront s'abattre sur son ministère épiscopal, d'une durée record de 85 ans. Si le premier traité contre les païens, restait encore conforme à une apologétique d'école et regroupait contre les idolatries des arguments bibliques plutôt usés, il n'en paraissait pas moins ajouter à des notes scolaires de jeunesse un exposé final, plus neuf et mieux réfléchi, sur le rôle du Logos dans l'économie du salut: il conduit, en tout cas, à la belle leçon, justement célèbre. Sur l'incarnation du Verbe qui forme comme un second traité, indépendant et complémentaire du premier...¹⁵

Up to this point in the life of the early church, it has become very clear the church's understanding of the problem of evil was directly related to its socio-religious environment.

The abiding hope of the early church rested in its belief in God's sovereignty and His Kingdom rule. In the community of faith, belief in His eternal providence and rule translated into a social alternative, a breaking with the evil of the world to both denounce the world and change the course of evil.

He saw this forming in the Apostolic Period, but the lines begin to alter through the second and third centuries. With the Gnostic crisis and the gathering storm within the empire, the church is forced to see evil in context. Irenaeus (and Clement of Alexandria) dealt extensively with the problem of evil but specifically in the social context of Gnosticism. It is impossible to understand their perspectives apart from the heresy of the day.

But by the fourth century, the social world had remarkably evolved. Christianity was the state religion. Although over half of the inhabitants of the empire were still pagan, the church was expanding. But now an internal dispute was to affect the understanding of evil.

¹⁵C. Kannengiesser, "La Bible et la Crise Arienne," *Le Monde grec ancien et la Bible*, ed. C. Mondésert (Paris: Beauchesne, 1984) 307.

Athanasius' theology - particularly where it touches an understanding of the problem of evil - was influenced by three issues: his view of the Godhead, the all sufficiency of Christ and his hermeneutic. In his famous Statement of Faith, a work that marks itself among his pre anti-Arian treatises,¹⁶ Athanasius wrote,

We believe in the Unbegotten God, Father Almighty, maker of all things both visible and invisible, that hath His being from Himself. And in one Only-begotten Word, Wisdom, Son, begotten of the Father without beginning and eternally; word not pronounced nor mental, not an effluence of the Perfect, nor a dividing of the impossible Essence, not an issue; but absolutely perfect Son, living and powerful, the true image of the Father equal in honour and glory...We believe likewise, also in the Holy Spirit that searcheth all things, even in the deep things of God, and we anathematise doctrines contrary to this...¹⁷

Such lofty statements of the Godhead appear often in Athanasius' work. He offered the Nicene Creed to his Definition of Nicea. He concluded Against the Heathen with the question, "Who then might this maker be?" Many of his letters carry this theme. In his first letter to Serapeon, he wrote,

There is then a Triad, holy and complete, confessed to be God in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, having nothing foreign or external mixed with it, not composed of one that creates and one that is originated but all creative; and it is consistent and in nature indivisible and its activity is one. The Father does all things through the Word in the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Yet apart from these explicit quotes, we see his essential commitment to the Godhead in the Homoousian crisis.¹⁹ Laying aside the modern debate of Athanasius' late use of the term²⁰ there is no doubt as to where he stood on the essential nature of the triad. As Kelly writes,

¹⁶Robertson, 83.

¹⁷*Statement of Faith* 1 (page 84 of Second Series, IV).

¹⁸see Quasten, 66-67 and Davies, 192 for amplification.

¹⁹J. N. D. Kelly provides a splendid definition of the term and the issues at stake in *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman Group, 1972) 242-254.

²⁰see Kelly's description 257-261.

...If in many of his writings he steered clear of homousios, he had no compunction about using paraphrases like "His oneness with the Father," "...offspring intimately united with the Father's substance," "intimately united with the Father's substance," "identity of Godhead and oneness of substance," and many more equally expressive.²¹

And this is equally true for the role of the Holy Spirit,

Athanasius asserts that the Scripture shows that the Spirit is Spirit of God and Spirit of the Son; the Son is wisdom and truth, the Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and truth. The Spirit's operation is inseparable from that of the Father and the Son, and the relationship between Father and Son must subsist also between the Son, and so also the Father and Spirit...The Spirit is therefore not a creature, but one with Father and Son in the deity of the Trinity, and homousios with God.²²

Such a theological commitment and statement in the face of the religious crisis of his day was in no uncertain terms radical. It ultimately lead Athanasius to weigh out all issues in light of his Christology. Without labouring this issue beyond the scope of this paper, one example will suffice.

In Incarnation of the Word, Athanasius deals with God's goodness in the light of man's ruin. How will this be dealt with?

For this cause, then, death having gained upon men and corruption abiding upon them, the race of man was perishing; the rational man made in God's image was disappearing, and the handiwork of God was in process of dissolution. For death...gained from that time forth a legal hold over us, and it was impossible to evade the law, since it had been laid down by God because of the transgression and the result was in truth at once monstrous and unseemly...For God would not be true, if, when He had said we should die, man dies not...It was, then, out of the question to leave men to the current corruption, because this would be unseemly, and unworthy of God's goodness.²³

Furthermore, he adds

For this was once more both to bring the corruptible to incorruption, and to maintain intact the just claim of the Father upon all. For being Word of the Father, and above all, He alone of natural fitness was both

²¹Ibid., 260.

²²H. Cunliffe-Jones, ed. *A History of Early Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 107.

²³*Incarnation of the Word* 6,1, 2, 9.

able to recreate everything, and worthy to suffer on behalf of all and to be ambassador for all with the Father.²⁴

This thought culminates later on,

For this purpose, then, the incorporeal and incorruptible and immaterial Word of God comes to our realm, howbeit He was not far from us before. For no part of Creation is left void of Him.²⁵

These very principles enunciated by Athanasius lead Mühlenberg to state,

"Ma thèse sera que c'est Athanase qui a identifié dans la vérité et la bonté de Dieu le fond des tensions inhérentes à la notion de Dieu telle que la tradition qui l'a développée; en plus, je voudrais démontrer qu'Athanase s'est aperçu que la tension entre la vérité et la bonté de Dieu est insoluble au niveau philosophique et que, pour cette raison, Athanase a transféré la doctrine de Dieu à la christologie."²⁶

But ultimately all of this must be seen within Athanasius' hermeneutic. H.J. Sieben²⁷ attributes this church father's greatness to his "exegetical spirit."²⁸ T.E. Pollard attributes Athanasius' victory over Arius to his use of scripture.²⁹ We see the appeal to the scriptures throughout his works,

But you taking occasion by this if you light upon the text of the Scriptures, by genuinely applying your mind to them, will learn from them more completely and clearly the exact detail of what we have said.³⁰

In a letter, he wrote,

²⁴Ibid., 7,5.

²⁵Ibid., 8,1.

²⁶Kannengiesser, 215.

²⁷Ibid., 196.

²⁸see Kannengiesser, page 196, n.2 for a summary of the last 100 years of thought on Athanasius and scripture.

²⁹T. E. Pollard, "Exegesis of the Scripture and The Arian Controversy," *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 41, (1959) 414-429.

³⁰*Incarnation of the Word* 56,1.

These are the fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness.³¹

And again he adds,

For although the sacred and inspired Scriptures are sufficient to declare the Truth...³²

Therefore, it becomes abundantly evident that Athanasius will not tackle evil apart from the scriptural\spiritual principles that shaped his theology. Ultimately his unwavering commitment to these three doctrines we have just surveyed form the foundation of the response he gives to the problem of his day. This is as true in his earliest writings as in his later more anti-heretical works.

ATHANASIUS' THEODICY

Athanasius does not hide his philosophical bias when he defines evil in Against the Heathen. In his initial chapters he writes,

In the beginning wickedness did not exist. Nor indeed does it exist even now in those who are holy, nor does it in any way belong to their nature.³³

But good is, while evil is not; by what is then, I mean what is good, inasmuch as it has its pattern in God Who is. But by what is not I mean what is evil, insofar as it consists in a false imagination in the thoughts of men.³⁴

Now certain of the Greeks, having erred from the right way, and not having known Christ have ascribed to evil a substantive and independent existence...³⁵

³¹Robertson, *Letter xxxix*, 6, 552.

³²*Against the Heathen* 1,3.

³³*Ibid.*, 2,1.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 4,4.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 5,1.

...The truth of the Church's theology must be manifest: that evil has not from the beginning been with God or in God, nor has any substantive existence; but that men in default of the vision of good, began to devise and imagine for themselves was not, after their own pleasure."

This is the clearest (and the only) definition we have of evil in Athanasius' works. (He adds a short statement in Incarnation 4,5 "for what is evil is not but what is good is.") There is obviously a Neoplatonist conception of evil here. The classic statement by the great third century philosopher, Plotinus, lies at the heart of this novel innovation in ancient thought. He wrote,

Given that the Good is not the only existent thing, it is inevitable that, by the outgoing from it or if the phrase be preferred, the continuous down-going or away-going from it, there should be produced a Last, something after which nothing more can be produced: this will be Evil. As necessarily as there is Something after the First, so necessarily there is a Last: this Last is Matter, the thing that has no residue of good in it; here is the necessity of Evil."

The principle idea of Plotinus' thought is that all that exists is good to the extent that it actually exists - but also evil to the extent that it does not exist. There is a constant source of dialogue between the intricacies of Plotinus' philosophy³⁶ and his direct influence of the theology of the church. Hick, for example, has no difficulty drawing a direct line, referring to Athanasius and the "privation of good"³⁷ argument.

In a very significant article,⁴⁰ H.J. Blumenthal takes a very different perspective on Plotinus' influence and therefore sees his comments on evil in a unique light. This has a direct bearing on the question of influence. He wrote,

³⁶Ibid., 7,3

³⁷Plotinus, *Enneads* 3rd ed., (translated by S. Mackenna) (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) i, 8, 7.

³⁸see H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus, ed., *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* (London: Variorum Publications, 1981).

³⁹J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1966) 53, n.2.

⁴⁰Blumenthal, 212-222.

...These 2 passages (Proclus' Platonic Theology) encapsulate the view most, if not all later Neoplatonists took of Plotinus. To them he was a deeply respected figure, but they could not be satisfied with the relatively low level of complexity and elaboration in his analysis of the intelligible universe.⁴¹

He then goes on to say,

...Plotinus' views on the question (of evil) have been much discussed, and various attempts made to reconcile what appear to be conflicting expressions of them. The first is that evil is matter, which is evil intrinsically; the second that the negativity of matter is incidentally a cause of evil in conjunction with the soul...Proclus denied both that matter could be evil, since for him matter was directly, rather than mediately, related to the One, and also that there could be self-subsistent evil at all.⁴²

Therefore, to categorize the issue borders is a simplistic reasoning. Obviously in the Athanasian definition we see the influence of the third century philosophical thought in reaction to the Gnostic, and, more precisely, Manichaen dualism. The extent of that influence is not at all clear.

But in expositing this definition, Athanasius appeals to the character of God. By granting evil a substance of its own, he claims these writers are denying the Creator, the maker of all.⁴³ The Creator alone stands in opposition to evil. For Athanasius, the Neoplatonic understanding was the biblical perspective. At no point does he ever venture to speculate otherwise.

Yet, how does he understand evil? What is his response to the problems it poses, especially in his earliest works? Idolatry is singularly associated with evil by Athanasius,

⁴¹Ibid., 212.

⁴²Ibid., 220.

⁴³Against the Heathen 6,1.

Accordingly, evil is the cause which brings idolatry in its train; for men, having learned to contrive evil, which is no reality in itself, in like manner feigned for themselves as gods beings that had no real existence.⁴⁴

He then embarks on several chapters in this initial work in describing the ancient religious system of his day. This is prefaced with a further insight into the nature of evil - its advancing capabilities,

Then going yet lower in their dark imaginations they gave the name of gods to the upper nether and the air and the things in the air. Next, advancing further in evil, they came to celebrate as gods the elements...⁴⁵

Certainly in this aspect of his understanding of evil, Athanasius parallels the early church fathers, Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian who wrote against Gnosticism. Other beliefs are clear evidences of evil in his opinion. In Deposition of Arius, he writes,

I was desirous to pass such a matter by without notice, in the hope that perhaps the evil would spend itself among its supporters and not extend to other places to defile the ears of the simple.⁴⁶

But the nature of evil also extends to a very clear statement concerning the devil. In Incarnation of the Word, Athanasius begins to develop his doctrine of evil spirits. Man can be biased towards evil spirits,⁴⁷ the word challenged these powers,⁴⁸ God manifests His power over them,⁴⁹ because they deceive men.⁵⁰ Athanasius continued to deal with this subject in later works. In Life of Anthony, in speaking of the aesthetic, he wrote,

⁴⁴Ibid., 8,3

⁴⁵Ibid., 9,1.

⁴⁶*Deposition of Arius* 1.

⁴⁷*Incarnation of the Word* 15,5.

⁴⁸Ibid., 18,4.

⁴⁹Ibid., 19,2 and 23,2.

⁵⁰Ibid., 55,5.

But he remained in no wise harmed by the evil spirits, nor was he wearied with the contest, for there came to him and, VISIONS from above, and the weakness of the foe relieved him of much trouble and armed him with greater zeal.⁵¹

These numerous references⁵² must all be viewed in the context of three principle references to the devil in Incarnation. According to Athanasius, the corruption of the race of man, the demise of His image in human beings, the ruin of man was because "...of the deceit practiced on men by the devil."⁵³ This had lead to bondage,⁵⁴

And once more, if the devil, the enemy of our race, having fallen from heaven, wanders about our lower atmosphere and there bearing rule over his fellow spirits...⁵⁵

But this evil is conquered by Christ's incarnation alone.

It should also be noticed that, although Athanasius never develops a clear position on free will as seen in Irenaeus, he does imply that the choices of humanity lead to evil.⁵⁶ He wrote,

Thus, then, God has made man and willed that he should abide in incorruption; but men, having despised and rejected the contemplation of God, and devised and contrived evil for themselves...⁵⁷

We are obviously witnessing a dramatic development in theodicy in this case. During the gnostic crisis, marked by the incipient dualism and the determinism motif, the church could find its way in determining the doctrines of

⁵¹*Lifestyle of Anthony* 13.

⁵²Over a dozen references in these two works have been personally counted.

⁵³*Incarnation of the Word* 6,5.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 20,6.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 25,5.

⁵⁶*Against the Heathen* 5,1.

⁵⁷*Incarnation of the Word* 4,2.

anthropology, harmatology and grace. A "knee jerk" response by appealing forcibly to free will alone was not necessary. But we get a rare glimpse of where doctrinal development is heading in Athanasius when he writes,

If we abide as we have been made, we are in a state of virtue, but if we think of ignoble things, we shall be accounted evil. If, therefore, this thing had to be acquired from without, it would be difficult in reality; but if it is in us, let us keep ourselves from foul thoughts. And let us preserve it for the Lord, that He may recognize His work as being the same as He made it.⁵⁸

This doctrine receives its crowning development, as we have seen, in Augustine.

But apart from such insights into the nature and expressions of evil, how does Athanasius see evil resolved? Repeatedly, he appeals to the truth of scripture and the incarnation of the Word. In concluding Against the Heathen, he appeals to the "inspired Scripture"⁵⁹ and "the wholly perfect Fruit of the Father, and is alone the Son and unchanging image of the Father."⁶⁰ He alone "shew Himself more powerful even than death"⁶¹ and

For where Christ is named, and His faith, then all idolatry is deposed and all imposture of evil spirits is exposed...But this work is not that of one dead but of one that lives - and especially of God.⁶²

He alone overcomes evil.⁶³

In the end, each believer must live above evil. Athanasius concluded *The Incarnation of the Word* by stating,

⁵⁸*Life of Anthony* 20.

⁵⁹*Against the Heathen* 5,1.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 46,8.

⁶¹*Incarnation of the Word* 20,2.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 30,6.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 56,3.

...thus he that would comprehend the mind of those who speak of God must needs begin by washing and cleansing his soul, by his manner of living, and approach the saints themselves by imitating their works; so that associated with them in the conduct of a common life, he may understand also what has been revealed to them by God and thenceforth as closely knit to them, may escape the peril of the sinners and their file at the day of judgment..."

Evil is conquerable!

"Ibid., 57,3.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have attempted in this survey of six works of five different authors of the patristic period to examine the evolution of the doctrine of theodicy. In the specific context of the period 100 - 325, we have surveyed how four authors responded to the questions of human suffering and social injustice. I have attempted to show that this theodicy was deeply rooted in the questions that they faced and involved both a corporate response (how the church lived as the people of God in *koinonia*) and their valiant efforts to live out the gospel within that context. Through the use of a paradigm for contextual theological reflection, we have been able to see that this response was a "local theology", one that allowed them to reflect and act upon the gospel in the light of their own situation. This survey of the literature represents only an initial glimpse at the evolution of the doctrine, but does allow us to arrive at some preliminary conclusions that could also form the framework for further reflection in this field of study.

As the purpose of this document was not to test the viability of the paradigm, but rather to use it as a potential model so as to examine the doctrinal formulations, I will only make some tentative observations of its applicability. This tool provides for amazing cultural sensitivity, allowing the user to describe the situation (culture) and the themes that surfaced both in the context and the tradition that gave birth to this local expression of theodicy. As we have seen in the Apostolic Period in particular, the urban situation of the author of The Epistle to Diognetus¹ and the author of The Shepherd of Hermas² shaped the understanding of theodicy. Through the constant citation of the biblical texts and themes, it was easy to see how the

¹*The Epistle to Diognetus*, 5 (see page 21 of this document).

²*The Shepherd of Hermas*, VISION 2,1 (see page 4).

biblical tradition was influencing the formulation of the response of the writers to their situation, which was now very different from that of the biblical period. This was particularly evident in the hermeneutics of Irenaeus³ and Athanasius.⁴ Finally, the paradigm does allow us to see how the new local theodicy shaped the culture as we moved to the Augustinian formulation.⁵ The response that he articulated was rooted, as we have seen, in his conversion to Christianity from the Manichaens and the very specific issues that were raised by the Donatists and the Manichaens, yet it had consequences for decades to follow on how the church interpreted the human suffering and social injustice that people endured.

But this paradigm most importantly helps us to see how these new local theodicies influenced the tradition. Because they were not afraid to let the cultural setting address their understanding of the scriptures, they were able to contextualize their theodicy in a practical, rather than a philosophical, manner. The situation helped shape the confession of faith.

In this context, what preliminary conclusions can we make from this survey as to the evolution of theodicy? First, we can see quite clearly from the writings to Diognetus, The Shepherd, and of Irenaeus, Athanasius and Augustine, that there is continuity with the biblical record. Although the themes from the culture change and the formulation evolves during the principal 225 years under study, the conclusions we articulated at the conclusion of the first chapter still hold throughout this period. Human suffering is still conceived as both a consequence of sin and a situation for spiritual formation. It is significant to point out that the words change, but the conceptual framework remains deeply rooted in the community of faith.

³see page 61 .

⁴see pages 82-83.

⁵see page 35.

Therefore, Diognetus can state that Christians still suffer like all people⁶ and Hermas can formulate, in an apocalyptic perspective, the ethical implications of actions.⁷ Yet suffering is not denied or dismissed. As we will see in the final conclusion, the atonement provided by Jesus Christ continues to give hope in the midst of the crises. Interestingly, social injustice, although addressed as we have pointed out,⁸ is not a preoccupation. Yet the intervention of Christ in history is crucial.

This continuity is clearly seen as we employed a social hermeneutic in the analysis of the texts. As the social context and the texture of life in each place and at each time was discerned, it became easier to see the evolution of the theodicy of the patristic period and its continuity with the biblical record. In the Apostolic Period, the scriptures are rarely cited, yet both The Epistle to Diognetus⁹ and The Shepherd¹⁰ illustrate the two dimensions of the biblical paradigm. The former document analyzes the praxis of the church in the city as she faces social injustice, yet pursues integrity in life and deed. The latter lays emphasis on the actions of the individual and the necessity to pursue repentance to face the evil inherent in disobedience. The call to live a consecrated life as part of spiritual formation is also evident in this work. With Irenaeus, the dominant concern shifts to the transmission of a true faith in a context that was dealing with both persecution and heresy. The biblical framework is now less evident, but, in a manner unparalleled in the period under question, Irenaeus quotes scriptures¹¹ to challenge his readers to deal creatively with the situation. Increasingly,

⁶*The Epistle to Diognetus*, 5.

⁷see pages 53-54.

⁸see pages 21-22; page 37; page 52; page 72.

⁹*The Epistle to Diognetus*, 5-6.

¹⁰*The Shepherd of Hermas*, MANDATE 5,1.

¹¹N. Geisler and W. Nix, *General Introduction to The Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968) 353-354.

the devil and the spirit world are linked in theodicy.¹² Now true praxis entails serving God, living properly and obeying ecclesiastical authority. Athanasius does not significantly alter this innovation of Irenaeus. He, too, is committed to a strong hermeneutic and use of the scriptures. But the context has now shifted to the internal debates and division within the church.¹³ A clearer articulation of the role of the will begins to surface within theodicy. With the Augustinian formulation, local problems become the context to define evil and propose a praxis that was to orient the church for centuries.¹⁴ The original framework is barely evident now, yet the issues of evil that have their resolution in the scriptural theology, (and are distorted by the enemies of faith as Augustine perceived them), are expressed in clear terms. As he is converted to Christianity from an implicitly dualistic system in a social context that forced the church to look within oneself, (rather than in the specific social context), he offers a practical theodicy rooted in the character of God.

But it is exactly at this juncture that this continuity is to give way to a new view as to how theology and therefore theodicy is formed. The roots are being laid for theology to become more an abstract science, unrelated to the realities of the specific cultural context. Harvie Conn reaches a very similar conclusion in a longitudinal study of the intersection of theology and culture in the same period under question. He writes,

Out of this (i.e., accomodation with philosophy) came eventually a new understanding of how theology was formed. Theology saw itself as more and more an abstractionist task, a searching for essences untouched by the realities of the cultural context. The goal of theology became a rational display of the Platonic idea.

¹²*Against Heresies*, 3.8,2; 3.20,1; 4.41,2 and 5.23,1.

¹³see page 79.

¹⁴see pages 34-35.

...True theology is seen as *sui generis*, the liberating search of the mind of essence, care, unhindered by any kind of historical, geographical or social qualifier.¹⁵

Second, this theodicy, as we have repeated on numerous occasions, was a praxis for this era. As Kenneth Surin has pointed out, "Crucial to our argument is the principle that all philosophical and theoretical reflection, no matter how theoretical such reflection may be, inevitably mediates a certain social and political praxis."¹⁶ I would suggest, that these theodicies of the patristic era do not avert our eyes from the cruelties that existed in the world of that time, as these authors lived in it, experienced it and then wrote about it. Here is an evolving theology that addressed real life issues and was deeply rooted in the specific context of each author. As we have summarized the conclusions of each author's thoughts on theodicy, we have seen that they were articulating a biblical response, in contextual language, that spoke to the specific issues that had been raised in the work under study. Diognetus described a praxis that distinguished Christians in the midst of urban complexities. The Shepherd encouraged repentance and individual action to overcome evil. Irenaeus addressed the issue of recapitulation so that, "He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."¹⁷

Third, the various articulations that we have studied show us how contextual this patristic theology really was. It was not simply "borrowed" from the other theologies of the period. This is not said to deny the continuity of Diognetus through to Augustine or the influence of other philosophical systems on the evolution of the doctrine of human suffering and social injustice. Rather, I am underscoring the importance that each author pursued in an

¹⁵H. Conn, "Contextual Theologies: A Question of Agendas," *Westminster Theological Journal*, 52 (1990), 59.

¹⁶K. Surin, *Theodicy? Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986) 50.

¹⁷*Against Heresies*, 3,5 PREFACE.

understanding of the context and addressed the biblical paradigm in a fashion that dealt with the relevant themes from the situation.

Finally, we see from this initial survey of the theodicy of these patristic writers that their view of the doctrine of the justice of God in the face of human suffering and social injustice was deeply rooted in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. This is seen explicitly in every writer that we have studied in this text. The Epistle to Diognetus turns from the defense of Christians in the world (in chapters V-VII that we examined in chapter two of this work) to the work of Christ (chapters VIII-X). The Shepherd of Hermas roots repentance in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We read, "Go and tell all men to repent and they shall live unto God ... but being longsuffering, the Lord willeth them that were called through His Son to be saved."¹⁸ Irenaeus clearly articulated his doctrine of recapitulation as the summary of God's plan to overcome evil. Athanasius saw the all sufficiency of Christ as God's response to evil.

Therefore, I am led to make these two summary statements. The atonement is the patristic response to the problems of human suffering and social injustice. These writers were constantly looking back to the redemptive work of Christ as a point of departure to understand evil.¹⁹

¹⁸*The Shepherd of Hermas*, PARABLE 8,11.

¹⁹P.T. Forsythe wrote in *The Justification of God* (London: Latimer House, 1948) 53,
The final theodicy is no discovered system, no revealed plan, but an effective redemption. It is not in the grasp of ideas, nor in the adjustment of events, but in the destruction of guilt and the taking away of the sin of the world.
Further, he adds,
If it is needful that the moral idea became still more pointed, we must put it that the only possible theodicy is an adequate atonement (Ibid., 167).

Second, this understanding of the atonement, as we have already mentioned,²⁰ now takes on greater meaning. The Christ of the cross for these writers was "*Christus Victor*". With His death, there is not simply the provision for theological or ethical implications. Rather, the atonement was a dramatic reversal of the flow of history. God in Christ had provided for the very contextual issues that confronted the church at this time.²¹

As we have repeatedly seen in this survey, the final word on the theodicy of these writers of the patristic period is quite definitive. Evil is conquerable!

²⁰see page 16.

²¹see D.J. Hall, *God and Human Suffering* for an alternative perspective on this view of the atonement. Unfortunately he does not consider any patristic data in his analysis.

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