

“It Never Entered My Mind”: The Problematic Theodicy of Theistic Determinism

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This article evaluates contemporary expressions of compatibilist theodicy that identify God as the primary agent of evil. The author questions this conclusion by appealing to God’s sovereignty in Scripture, the basic semantics of רָצָה, exegesis of crux passages, biblical theology comprehensively understood, and historical theology accurately quoted. In each arena, the author exposes invalid arguments and presuppositions expressive of theistic determinism. The author then arrives at a different conclusion.

Key Words: רָצָה, πονηρός, κακός, theodicy, God as primary agent of evil, compatibilism, theistic determinism, hardening, Jeremiah 32:35, 1 John 3:5

“Is he [God] 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?*”
(David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part 10)

What question could be more relevant in our post-9-11 world? And what question should Christians be more eager to address? For Christianity robustly answers David Hume’s quotation of Epicurus’s famous trilemma: “God is *both willing and able!*” In the birth of Christ, sinless, holy God has become man to defeat Satan and solve the problem of human sin. As Heb 2:14 explains: “*Since then the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death he might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives*” (cf. 1 John 3:8). Yes, God is both willing *and* able. He has conquered sin, death, and Satanic evil through the saving sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ (cf. John 12:31, 16:11; Rev 21:11).

The purpose of this article is to evaluate arguments that assert that God is able but *unwilling* to prevent evil because he wills it and is in fact evil’s primary agent. Until recently, I was under the impression that no one

Author’s note: I would like to dedicate this article to Jay Kesler, President Emeritus of Taylor University and Senior Pastor of Upland Community Church.



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:

Journal for Theological Interpretation 3.1 (2009)

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really adheres to this view anymore—that it is a caricature inaccurately and unreasonably attributed to high Calvinists by misinformed critics. However, this impression changed when I heard Professor Mark Talbot espouse this position in explicit terms. Surprised, I soon discovered that this is also the view of systematic theologian Wayne Grudem, well-known author and preacher John Piper, renowned Bible scholar Don Carson, a number of my own close colleagues and friends, and a significant minority of my talented students.¹ Professing a different perspective, I shall attempt in this article to expose the weaknesses of this view, as I see them, and to further constructive conversation on this extremely important subject.

OUR COMMON GROUND

Methodologically, I embrace Mark Talbot's conviction that we are "obliged to try to understand what *all* of God's word had to say about this topic. For the Scriptures, like other writings, can be twisted to support almost any position if they are quoted selectively."² Theoretically, I also find attractive Talbot's and Carson's respective visions of compatibilism; namely, that biblical revelation and historical reality require that God's sovereignty and human freedom be compatible truths. It is wrong to pit the two against one another. Experientially, I concur with any testimony to God's refinement of our faith and character through pain and suffering. God is indeed a refiner's fire, and it is biblically true that he does discipline them whom he loves (Heb 12:4–11). Empirically and pastorally, I agree with Talbot and

1. The following statements are representative: "I conclude that nothing happens to us—nothing good and nothing bad—that is not ultimately from God" (Mark Talbot, "True Freedom: The Liberty That Scripture Portrays as Worth Having" in *Beyond the Bounds* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2003], 79); "Many Christians spoke this way about the murderous destruction of the World Trade Towers on September 11, 2001: 'God did not cause it, but He can use it for good.' Of course God can and does use our calamities for our good. I am not denying that. But that is very different from saying, 'God did not cause the calamity.' There are two reasons I do not say, 'God uses, but does not cause calamity.' One is that it goes beyond, and is contrary to, what the Bible teaches. The other is that it undermines the very hope it wants to offer" (John Piper, "Why I Do Not Say, 'God Did Not Cause the Calamity, but He Can Use It for Good,'" in *Life as a Vapor* [Oregon: Multnomah, 2004], 122). See also Hugh J. McCann: "If, as we would expect, God's sovereignty over creation is complete, then nothing ever occurs except by his decree. The creative fiat of God is equally and fully responsible for all that exists. . . . As creator, God is intimately and directly involved with the occurrence of those acts in which we sin—as involved as we would be in a story we create, or a song we compose. Our freedom does not, therefore, get God off the hook" ("The Author of Sin?" *Faith and Philosophy* 22 [2005]: 144, 147). McCann's analogy is invalid, however. God is not only the author of history but also an active participant within it and thus not an apt analogue to an author of fiction. Furthermore, we do in fact hold authors accountable for the moral content of their literary creations. Authors of pornographic, "adult" literature create works that correlate with their own reprobate characters. Creators of adult video games are responsible for the adverse effects of their creations. This would be equally true of God, if humanity, created in the image of God, did not have the freedom to make autonomous responsible decisions.

2. "True Freedom: The Liberty That Scripture Portrays as Worth Having," 95.

Grudem that "evil is real, not an illusion, and we should never do evil, for it will always harm us and others."³ Further, I appreciate Grudem's qualifications that "God never does evil, and is never to be blamed for evil" and "God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do."⁴ And most importantly, we agree that to be a genuine Christian is not to espouse a particular theodicy but to be one with God through the atoning work of Jesus, as appropriated by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Finally, I admire the courageous honesty of these brothers in Christ, who are passionately preaching and teaching what they believe to be the gospel truth, despite our postmodern world's antipathy toward absolute truth claims.

Where our views of compatibilism diverge is with our definitions of sovereignty and free will. Talbot, like Don Carson, associates God's sovereignty with omnicausation.⁵ This, for me, is exegetically problematic because the Bible describes God's sovereignty in terms of God's creation of a good world (Gen 1–2), his kingship over the people of Israel, and his ultimate function as final judge of all responsible agents. The word sovereignty, stemming as it does from the Latin word *superanus*, "chief of state in a monarchy," "supreme," "supremacy of authority or rule," is a fitting description of the biblical message that culminates not in determinist philosophy but in Jesus' manifestation of the kingship of God and Revelation's closing depiction of God's vindication of his faithful people, his punitive judgment of evil, and his creation of the new heavens and the new earth. Building on Rev 12 and Gen 1–3, my understanding of free will is that Satan, Adam, and Eve originally did have the freedom to choose between obeying and disobeying God. They willingly chose to sin. Hence, God's wrath and judgment are just throughout the Bible up to the consummation of God's final judgment in Rev 20. I do not understand how the free will advocated by Talbot and Carson is indeed free, if God is the primary agent of evil and if human beings are powerless to avoid doing what God has predetermined them to do. Appeals to mystery seem unnecessary in view of the nonmysterious messages of Gen 3, Rom 5, and Rev 12—that sin entered the world through humankind and Satan in direct defiance of God. Evidence that God was the primary agent of disobedience against himself is totally foreign to these crux passages. Finally, like many, I also cannot understand how human beings can be culpable for sins that God has predetermined that they commit and how God can be holy if he is the primary agent of all that the Bible categorically identifies as unholy.

3. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 329.

4. *Systematic Theology*, 328–29.

5. For Carson's definition of compatibilism, see *How Long O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 179–88, where he appeals to many of the same passages listed below. While validly criticizing free will theists for presupposing a priori definitions of free will, it's ironic that Carson presupposes an a priori definition of his own in his equation of divine sovereignty with divine omnicausation (*How Long O Lord?* 194–96).

GOD AS PRIMARY AGENT OF EVIL:
THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

Grudem and Talbot offer an impressive list of biblical references that identify God initiating evil to accomplish his purposes. The most repeated of these include Joseph's response to his brothers, "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20) and the NT revelation that the evil of Jesus' crucifixion occurred according to God's predetermined plan (Acts 2:23, 4:27). Grudem also appeals to God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exod 4:21, 7:3; Isa 63:17; etc.); God's sending of an "evil spirit" between Abimelech and the men of Shechem in Judg 9:23, God's intervention to prevent the sons of Eli from listening to their father, because "the Lord desired to put them to death" (1 Sam 2:25); God's tormenting of Saul with "an evil spirit" (1 Sam 16:14); God's threat against David in 2 Sam 12:11: "I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight"; God's killing of the firstborn child of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:15-18); God's inciting of David's census that resulted in the deaths of 70,000 men (2 Sam 24:1); God's raising up of adversaries to Solomon (1 Kgs 11:14, 23); God's allowing Satan to bring evil on Job (Job 1:22); God's placing of a deceiving spirit in the mouth of false prophets (1 Kgs 22:23); God's use of Assyria to punish his people (Isa 10:5); God's use of Babylon to destroy Judah (Jer 25:9, 11); God's deceiving of false prophets (Ezek 14:9); Amos's declaration, "If a calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?" (Amos 3:6; cf. 4:6-11; Isa 45:7); Lamentations' admonition "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?" (Lam 3:38); God's action in the story of Jonah to work through the choices of human beings to accomplish his plan (Jonah 1:15, 2:3); God's sending of a deluding influence over unbelievers so that they might believe what is false (2 Thess 2:11); and Peter's statement that those who reject Christ "stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do" (1 Pet 2:8). These passages lead Grudem to conclude "God uses all things to fulfill his purposes and even uses evil for his glory and for our good."⁶ Talbot similarly summarizes, "taken as a whole the Scriptures do either assert or assume or imply that God ordains everything, including natural and moral evil."⁷ And on the same foundation, John Piper proclaims that Jesus suffered and died "to show that the worst evil is meant by God for good."⁸ Indeed, "God rules the world in such a way that all calamities and all sin remain in his ultimate control and therefore within his ultimate design and purpose."⁹

6. *Systematic Theology*, 327.

7. "True Freedom," 97. To the list above, Talbot adds 1 Cor 2:7-8.

8. *The Passion of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 118. This perspective pervades Piper's documents on the Desiring God Ministries website.

9. "Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained That Evil Be?" [cited July 1, 1998]. Online: http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessage/ByDate/1476_Is_God_

EVALUATION OF THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

Before evaluating this vast list of references, it is important to establish what we are looking for. We are looking for biblical evidence that God is the first cause, the primary agent of *evil*. We are looking for evidence that God *initiates* evil without provocation and without the purpose of punishing sins previously committed by other responsible agents—human or demonic. By evil we mean unprovoked, unjust suffering, humiliation, torture, pain, and death that one party inflicts on another with the premeditated intent to harm maliciously. Therefore, as we review the above biblical examples, the question is whether or not they are analogous to the evils we encounter in our world today. Do these passages lead to the conclusion that God is the primary agent of rape, child abuse, racism, pornography, bestiality, Satan worship, theological heresy, blasphemy, the illegal trafficking of drugs, prostitution, etc.? Do they affirm Talbot's argument that "*nothing* happens to us—nothing good *and* nothing bad—that does not ultimately come from God's hand"?¹⁰

In my judgment, the Joseph story fails this test. The Hebrew word for evil in Gen 50:20, רָעָה, which bears the weight of the argument and the substance of many of the references listed, is a word that has a notoriously broad range of meanings in Hebrew including "evil, harm, wickedness, perverseness, misery, trouble, disaster,"¹¹ etc.—meanings different from connotations of "evil" in contemporary English usage.¹² The word רָעָה, to be sure, can mean "evil" in the familiar sense, but the biblical, theological, and historical contexts have to decide.

A good example of the dynamic breadth of רָעָה is found in Prov 16:4:

"The Lord has made everything for its own purpose,
even the wicked for the day of evil." (NASB)

"The Lord has made everything for its purpose,
even the wicked for the day of trouble." (ESV and NRSV)

"The Lord works out everything for his own ends—even

Less_Glorious_Because_He_Ordained_that_Evil_Be/. In the same article, Piper summarizes: "therefore I conclude with Jonathan Edwards, 'God decrees all things, even all sins.' Or as Paul says in Ephesians 1:11, 'He works all things after the counsel of his will.'"

10. "True Freedom," 96. Emphasis is Talbot's.

11. David W. Baker, "רָעָה," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:1154.

12. Koehler and Baumgartner provide the following range of semantic equivalents for רָעָה in the OT: "wicked," "evil," "sad," "bad," "of little worth," "poor (in quality)," "not beneficial," "contemptible," "of an evil disposition," "morally depraved," "reprobate," "malicious," "injurious," "sinister," "bringing misfortune," "badly disposed," "ill-disposed," "heavy," "sullen," "evil in contrast to good" (*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 3:1250–53). Approximately the same semantic range characterizes the related noun רָע, the adjective רָעָה, and the verb רָעָה. Each term has to be understood in its literary and theological context. Universal applications of one narrow meaning, especially a contemporary meaning, ignore the discipline of semantics altogether. Carson, wisely, does not integrate a word study of רָעָה into his argument.

the wicked for a day of disaster." (NIV)
 "The Lord has made each thing for its own end;
 so he has made the wicked for a day of calamity." (REB)

These variant translations demonstrate the dynamic nature of Hebrew in general and the word רָעָה specifically. Following the rationale of the above scholars, the NASB translation could be presented persuasively to lay audiences as substantiating the theodicy of theistic determinism. Argumentation of this sort would be misleading, however, both because of the dynamic range of meanings for רָעָה and because of the broader context of the book of Proverbs. For a universally applied doctrine of God as primary agent of all evil encounters awkward difficulties in explaining away Prov 15:9a, "the way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord" (NASB), Prov 15:26a, "evil plans are an abomination to the Lord" (NASB), Prov 15:29a, "The Lord is far from the wicked" (NASB), Prov 17:15, "He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord" (NASB), Prov 29:6a, "an evil man is ensnared by his own sin" (NIV), etc. Particularly awkward is the rationalization that God is the universal primary agent of the abominations that God himself despises. More likely is a rendering of רָעָה in Prov 16:4 that communicates *proverbially* God's ordained will that the wicked ultimately suffer a fate of calamity.¹³

In the context of Gen 50:20, it is the misfortune of Joseph's being sold into slavery that results in the accomplishment of God's "good" plan to preserve a people in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. This context is very different from that of pornography, rape, child-sacrifice, and so on, which are inconceivable as positive contributions to God's plan of salvation. The NIV therefore translates Gen 50:20 "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."¹⁴ In this regard, I find unpersuasive Charles Hodge's statement that "what is true of the story of Joseph, is true of all history."¹⁵ To the contrary, the Joseph story is a special revelation of God within Scripture and not a general revelation for universal application. Talbot is therefore wise to concede this point to Greg Boyd: "Boyd is correct in

13. This is in fact the position of most commentaries on Proverbs; e.g., the recent appraisal of Tremper Longman III: "Most commentators (Murphy, Clifford, Whybray) take this verse to mean that the wicked are made for the day of their own judgment (evil day). This is not taken as a deterministic statement, but rather as an assertion that the wicked will not escape their appropriate judgment. The text may mean this, but I would like to suggest an alternative explanation that is more in keeping with the previous verse: God is in control of the wicked acts of human beings and uses their evil for good. . . . The verse is not a statement that God authors evil. The teaching of the verse fits well with the general biblical idea that humans author their own wickedness. It is a statement of God's control. God can use the very act of human rebellion and autonomy for his purposes" (*Proverbs* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 329).

14. Similarly, the REB: "You meant to do me harm; but God meant to bring good out of it by preserving the lives of many people, as we see today" (Gen 50:20).

15. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 1:544.

claiming that Genesis 50:20 should not itself 'be taken as a proof text of how God usually, let alone always, operates . . . nothing in the story itself warrants our taking what God has done there as representing what he does in every case.'¹⁶ In view of this concession, it is hard for me to understand why Grudem, Talbot, and Piper each adopt this text as foundational to their arguments, which do in effect make the Joseph story normative for world history.¹⁷

The analogy of all evil to the crucifixion is equally problematic. This argument, adopted from Jonathan Edwards, claims that if God intended the crucifixion, the greatest of all evils, for good, then it should also be the case that God has the same purpose for all lesser evils (including the sensational ones listed above).¹⁸ This is the foundation for John Piper's theodicy: "The clearest example that even moral evil fits into the designs of God is the crucifixion of Christ."¹⁹ This argument, however, does not accurately represent the NT, which never describes the crucifixion with *πονηρός*, *κακός*, or derivatives thereof. To the contrary, the NT preaches the cross as *εὐαγγέλιον* (1 Cor 15:1–4)—the ultimate expression of God's *sacrificial love*—"For God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8; cf. John 3:16).

Unlike the *unwilling* rape victim or the defenseless casualties of the holocaust, Jesus obediently and willingly gave his life as a *voluntary* expression of God's love, for he knew that his death was God's means of salvation: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. *No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative*" (John 10:17–18a).²⁰ While Scripture attributes the plan of the cross to God (Acts 2:23, 3:18–19, 4:27–28), it is equally clear that Jesus volitionally pursued the cross in obedience to his call and commission as suffering servant. And just as clear, as all agree, is Peter's identification of the assailants of Jesus as fully responsible for Jesus' execution: "But you disowned the Holy and righteous one, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the prince of life" (Acts 3:14–15).²¹ The Servant Songs of Isaiah similarly point in this direction as the conceptual background for the Passion event. Yes, "the Lord was pleased

16. *True Freedom*, 97.

17. Piper argues of Gen 50:20: "Therefore this text stands as a kind of paradigm for how to understand the evil will of man within the sovereign will of God" ("Is God Less Glorious?").

18. Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 406.

19. *Desiring God* (Portland: Multnomah, 1986), 37.

20. See also Rom 8:32, where Paul again describes Jesus' death as God's gracious sacrifice: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" Nowhere in the context does Paul remotely intimate that God's gracious gift is evil.

21. It is also noteworthy that the criminality of this event necessitates repentance on the part of those guilty—"But the things God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:18–19).

to crush him, putting him to grief . . . if he would render himself as a guilt offering" (Isa 53:10). In the end, the Servant's reward directly relates to his *volitional* sacrifice: "And he will divide the booty with the strong; because *he* poured out himself to death" (Isa 53:12; cf. Phil 2:5–11). To say that human sin is analogous, even on a much lesser plane, is a theological hypothesis foreign to biblical theology and indeed contradictory to the contrast Paul elucidates in Rom 5:16–19: "And the gift is *not* like that which came through the one who sinned." In any case, the Bible clearly does not offer the cross as a precedent for deterministic theodicy.

Is the biblical phenomenon of the hardening of the heart solid biblical evidence that God is the primary agent of evil? Does God harden arbitrarily simply to prove his sovereign power to do so? To the contrary, as I have argued elsewhere, God's hardening in Scripture is consistently conditioned on the sin of responsible human beings.²² In most cases, hardening corresponds to the specific sin of idolatry. The process of hardening displays how idolaters become like the idols that they worship: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands. . . . Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them" (Ps 115:5, 8; cf. Ps 135:15–18). Hence, as idols have eyes but cannot see, so it happens that human hearts become recalcitrant as they conform to the lifeless idols that they trust. It is not coincidental in my judgment that Pharaoh, the supposed incarnation of the Sun god Re, has in common with the hardened Judeans of Isa 6:9–10 a submersion in pagan idolatry (see Isa 2:8–9). And Paul's explanation of hardening in Rom 1:18–32 clearly connects divine hardening with exchanging "the glory of the incorruptible God for an image" (Rom 1:23).

God's hardening of Pharaoh is not arbitrary or unconditional. In accord with God's covenant with Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you" (Gen 12:3a), Pharaoh is culpable for his curse as a persecutor of God's people. A descendant of the Egyptian king who mass murdered the firstborn sons of Israel (Exod 1:16), Pharaoh emerges as a "chip off the old block"—an unfair, oppressive sovereign, who enslaves God's people and forces them into hard labor. He defies Yahweh directly: "*who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and besides, I will not let Israel go*" (Exod 5:1–2). Within OT theology, it is therefore not surprising that Pharaoh suffers this divine curse and that he is associated with Sihon and Og, other idolatrous pagan kings who stood in the way of God's deliverance of his people and suffered hardening as a consequence (see Deut 2:30–31, Ps 135:8–18).²³

22. Edward P. Meadors, *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006).

23. See *Idolatry and the Hardening of the Heart*, 17–36.

In view of these theological truths, God's hardening of biblical persons is not substantive evidence that God is the primary agent of evil—judgment and severe punishment yes, but evil, no. We may fully agree with John Calvin: "A very convincing argument may be drawn from the judgments of God to the sins of men; for God is just, and never punishes any one without a just cause, and does not blind a man, unless he deserves it, and voluntarily shuts his eyes. The blame therefore lies with men alone, who have of their own accord brought blindness on themselves" (*Commentary on Isaiah*, 3:378).

What about God's sending of an "evil spirit" on Abimelech in Judg 9 and King Saul in 1 Sam 16? Here again we see that God's action is judgment for sin and the term רָעַךְ expresses divine wrath as opposed to unprovoked intent to harm indiscriminately. Grudem's reference to Judg 9:23 would be more accurate biblically if it included the remaining part of the same sentence found in Judg 9:24: "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem . . . in order that the violence done to the seventy sons of Jerubbaal might come, and their blood might be laid on Abimelech their brother, who killed them and on the men of Shechem, who strengthened his hands to kill his brothers" (9:23a, 24). God is acting in righteous judgment, not random violence. The same is the case with Saul in 1 Samuel, where an "evil" spirit terrorizes Saul only after he had set up an altar to himself (1 Sam 15:12) and disobeyed God's instructions for conquest (1 Sam 15:10–26). And similar circumstances explain God's desire to put to death the sons of Eli in 1 Sam 2:25, where the context specifies: "the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for the men despised the offering of the Lord" (1 Sam 2:17). The phenomenon is thus conditioned on sin and altogether dissimilar to *unprovoked* evils like rape, genocide, child molestation, etc.²⁴

David's story furthers the theme of retributive justice characterizing the Former Prophets as a whole. Fitting the precedents we have observed, David's sins against Uriah the Hittite correspond with the phenomenon of God raising up evil (רָעַךְ) against David and the God-willed death of David and Bathsheba's child. 2 Samuel 12:11–18 harmonizes with Deuteronomistic theology as a whole when David's punishment is understood to be the consequence of his sin previously rebuked by the prophet Nathan: "Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in his sight?"

24. In response one might appeal to Zech 14:2: "For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city." This passage, however, is to be understood against the background of sin-caused exile as is evident in Isa 13:15–16, the probable conceptual background of Zech 14:2. It is instructive that Isa 13:15–16, "their little ones also will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished," occurs within Isaiah's prediction of God's judgment against Babylon on the day of the Lord: "Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity" (Isa 13:11a).

You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword" (2 Sam 12:9). The same is true of God's inciting David to take the census that resulted in the deaths of 70,000 Israelites (2 Sam 24:1, 15). The prefatory explanation, "the anger of the Lord burned against Israel," occasions the question "why?" Was God's anger arbitrary or was it provoked by sin? An exhaustive concordance search reveals that God's anger is always provoked by sin in the Bible, as is the case here, where David confesses: "It is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong" (2 Sam 24:17; cf. Exod 32:22, Num 32:13, Deut 4:25).²⁵ This does not eliminate the mystery of why God took the lives of the 70,000, but it does establish dissimilarity with contemporary mass murders, such as that of Armenian Christians in the early 20th century, which clearly were brought on not by the sins of the victims but by the cruelty of the perpetrators—a truth that all genocides, including abortion, have in common.

God's raising up adversaries of Solomon is to be understood similarly on the foundation of the macrotheme of retributive justice within the Former Prophets. It is instructive that the references to Hadad (1 Kgs 11:14) and Rezon (1 Kgs 11:23) occur within the context of God's anger at Solomon's polygamy and idolatry: "Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the Lord . . . that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded" (1 Kgs 11:9–10). Furthermore, Hadad's opposition to Solomon is clearly tied to the excessive, unauthorized violence Joab exercised against Edomites during the reign of David (1 Kgs 11:15). God is not acting without provocation or with the intent to harm indiscriminately. The analogy to all evil is therefore unsubstantiated.

The story of Job is arguably the strongest biblical evidence that God collaborates in evil. The Lord permits Satan to torment Job, kill his sons and daughters, destroy his servants and livestock, and traumatize Job's relationship with his wife. But Job falls short of a theodicy, as most commentators on Job have emphasized. Neither the book nor the character ever attempt to explain evil. The literary features, major themes, and characterization of Job attest this clarification. While Job 2–41 exhibits a unique form of *poetic* wisdom literature, its introduction and conclusion offer prosaic and yet almost apocalyptic disclosures of supernatural revelation. The brief disclosures in the introduction and conclusion appear in archetypal terms, hyperbolic proportions, and in figurative round numbers. Job is the archetypal righteous wise man ("the greatest of all the men of the east . . . a

25. References to the "anger of the Lord" are numerous in the OT. The following is an exhaustive list of references found in Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets, which establish the conceptual context for 2 Samuel: Deut 4:25; 6:15; 7:4; 9:18–19; 11:17; 13:17; 29:20, 23–24, 27–28; 31:29; Josh 7:1, 26; 23:16; Judg 2:12, 14, 20; 3:8; 10:7; 2 Sam 6:7; 24:1; 1 Kgs 14:15; 15:30; 16:7, 13; 22:53; 2 Kgs 13:3; 21:6; 23:26; 24:20.

blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil"), who had seven sons and three daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and very many servants. Job's conclusion is of one cloth with the introduction: "And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. . . 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen . . . no women were found as fair as Job's daughters. . . . Job lived 140 years, and saw his sons, and his grandsons, four generations" (Job 42:12, 15, 16). It appears obvious that Job was written in figurative language with the clear intent of being interpreted in figurative terms. In this case the leading question of Job is: "Is there ever a time to curse God—even when horrific things happen to righteous people?" Job's answer is clearly no. The truly wise will never curse God.

Among the leading themes of Job is its corrective to the universal application of retributive justice, as exemplified by Job's counterparts Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. For the omnicausality of theistic determinism to hold up, Job would have to evidence God as the initiator of the actions of these three. The text tells otherwise: "After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, 'I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has'" (Job 42:7). While Job wisely suspended judgment, his colleagues were quick to explain Job's suffering as God's punishment of Job's sin. But in the end, it was they whom God judged for destructive speculation at Job's expense, while it was Job whose misfortune God reversed. The book of Job therefore contrasts the wisdom of Job's suspended judgment with Eliphaz and company's prejudiced application of retributive justice.²⁶

Of course, it is also very important to interpret Job within the context of the broader revelation of Scripture. The image of Satan as God's right hand man who serves a positive role in testing the sincerity of Job's commitment, which one might construct on the basis of a literal interpretation of Job 1 in isolation, does not take into consideration Satan's disobedience to God in Gen 3 or Jesus' description of Satan as a murderer and a liar who speaks on his own initiative (John 8:44) or Satan's battle against Michael and his subsequent expulsion from heaven in Rev 12. Job certainly contributes to our understanding of Satan as "the accuser," but we should qualify Job's testimony with that of the rest of the Bible, especially less figurative passages, which portray Satan as an insidious, seductive opponent of God and his people—one who justly suffers the fate of being thrown by

26. This emphasis of Job is quite out of step with John Piper's reaction to the tsunami of 2005: "The point of every deadly calamity is this: repent. Let our hearts be broken that God means so little to us" ("Mercy for the Living: The Deadly Tsunami Should Drive Us to Our Knees in Repentance," *World Magazine Online* [cited Jan. 15, 2005]. Online: <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/10204>). How similar this reaction is to the unauthorized reactions of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, and how different it is from Job's suspended judgment in the face of his catastrophe. Ironically, in calling for repentance, Piper presupposes the guilt of the tsunami victims, i.e., that God's wrath in this case is God's reaction to human indifference.

God into the lake of fire in Rev 20:10. Would God be just in punishing Satan with eternal torment, if in truth Satan is God's lackey and if God is in fact the designer and first cause of the evil Satan performs—a conclusion even Martin Luther did not reach?²⁷

The phenomenon of God's putting a "deceiving spirit" in the minds of false prophets is to be understood within the context of false prophetic compliance with the political and military ambitions of villainous king Ahab (1 Kgs 22). The revelation of 1 Kgs 22:22 is in fact made to king Ahab by the true prophet Micaiah, whose prophecy Ahab foolishly rejected out of preference for the counsel of his ingratiating courtiers. Once again, the Scripture referred to does not evidence God acting without provocation with the intent to harm. This is an intentional act of God to enforce his righteous judgment against a totally corrupt regime.

The weakest link in the chain of proof texts above is the appeal to the Assyrian captivity of Israel (Isa 10:5) and the Babylonian captivity of Judah (Jer 25:9, 11). The ubiquitous prophetic explanations of these events in the writing prophets find precedent in the Pentateuch:

And all the nations shall say, why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this great outburst of anger? Then men shall say, because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. And they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they have not known and whom he had not allotted to them. Therefore, the anger of the Lord burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day. (Deut 29:24–28)

The exiles were not unprovoked evils that Israel and Judah suffered unconditionally. Exile, rather, was God's chosen punishment for Israel's idolatrous covenant infidelity (see Ezek 14). In turn, the cost of covenant infidelity was separation from the covenant land (Jer 5:19; Amos 5:26–27, 6:7–8; Dan 9:4–19). The phenomenon is altogether different from the Nazi invasions of WWII or contemporary persecutions of Christians by communist atheists or Islamic fundamentalists.

27. "Thus God, finding Satan's will evil, not creating it so (it became so by Satan's sinning and God's withdrawing), carries it along by His own operation and moves it where He wills; although Satan's will does not cease to be evil in virtue of this movement of God" (*The Bondage of the Will* [Grand Rapids: Revel, 1957], 206). Elsewhere, Luther's logic is problematic: "Here you see that when God works in and by evil men, evil deeds result; yet God, though He does evil by means of evil men, cannot act evilly Himself, for He is good, and cannot do evil; but He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the impulse and movement of His power. The fault which accounts for evil being done when God moves to action lies in these instruments, which God does not allow to be idle" (*The Bondage of the Will*, 204). Logically, it is self-evident that if God "does evil by means of evil men," then God does act evilly and is indeed responsible for the evil he causes, just as an axe murderer is guilty of his crime and not his axe.

Amos's statement "If calamity occurs in a city has not the Lord done it?" (Amos 3:6) is best understood within the context of the entire prophecy of Amos, the first two chapters of which identify the transgressions that God has called Amos to rebuke: "For three transgressions of Damascus and for four" (1:3a, 6a, 9a, 11a, 13a; 2:1, 4, 6). It is in this light that God's raining of calamity on a city is to be understood: "For three transgressions of Judah and for four I will not revoke its punishment, because they rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his statutes; their lies also have led them astray, those after which their fathers walked. So I will send fire on Judah, and it will consume the citadels of Jerusalem" (2:4-5). Amos's judgment is for sin (5:10-13, 26-27; 6:7-9) and the obstinate refusal to repent (4:6, 8, 9, 11). And yet Amos also sounds the benevolent call for restoration: "Seek the Lord that you may live, lest he break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph (5:6; cf. 5:4). That Amos does *not* identify God as the cause of indiscriminate evil is plainly evident in 5:14-15: "*Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and thus may the Lord God of hosts be with you, just as you have said! Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the gate! Perhaps the Lord God of hosts may be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*"

It is within this same theological purview that Jeremiah voices Lamentations. His grief is over the suffering that befell Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Exercising Job-like patience, resilience, and trust (3:19-32), Jeremiah grieves his suffering and the horrific suffering had by the inhabitants of Jerusalem at the time of invasion (2:20-22). And yet God's fiery wrath is not random, nor is it evidence that God was responsible as the primary agent of Judah's sin that his wrath justly punished. Jeremiah's lamentation is for Judah's sin and its accompanying suffering: "Judah has gone into exile under affliction" (1:3a). "For the Lord has caused her grief because of the multitude of *her* transgressions" (1:5a). "*Jerusalem* sinned greatly, therefore she has become an unclean thing" (1:8a). "The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, for *we* have sinned!" (5:16). Lamentations accords therefore with Jeremiah's broader prophetic judgment, which is conditioned on Judah's sin (cf. Jer 5). It is within this biblical context that we are to understand the dual revelations of God's wrath and his mercy spoken of in Lam 3:38: "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both ill and good go forth?" (cf. Rom 1:17-18).

As we move to the theology of the NT, God's nature, of course, remains the same even as revelation progresses in the incarnation of Jesus and the apocalyptic preaching of the Gospel. God's sending of a deluding influence in 2 Thess 2:11 corresponds with God's similar actions in hardening Pharaoh, cursing Saul, dehumanizing Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:33), and giving idolaters over to hardening (Isa 6:9; Jer 5:19-21; Ps 115:1-8). The deluding influence in 2 Thess 2:11 is commensurate with the retribution Paul speaks of in 2 Thess 1:7-9 and the idolatrous deception Paul attributes to the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thess 2:3-4. The delusion is not arbitrary or unconditional. To the contrary, it is directly related to rejection of the

gospel, collusion with the man of lawlessness, and judgment for taking pleasure in wickedness:

And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of his mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of his coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that all may be judged *who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness*. (2 Thess 2:8–12)

In these respects, Paul's comments in 2 Thessalonians concur with his famous explanation of sin in Rom 1:24–25: "Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

Finally, Grudem's appeal to 1 Pet 2:8b, "for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed," presupposes a form of unconditional damnation that is foreign to Peter's theology. While Christians may agree to disagree on the doctrine of double predestination (e.g., exegesis of Rom 9:21–24), it is incontrovertible that the NT ties judgment to sin (Rom 1) and salvation to faith in Christ (Rom 3–5). The same is true in 1 Peter, where the criterion for salvation is belief and obedience (1:21, 2:6–7a) exemplified by good works (1:17, 2:12), by contrast to the criteria for judgment, which are disbelief, disobedience, and participation in evil (2:7b–8, 14; 4:4–5, 17). Peter's ethical admonition to the scattered believers who are suffering unjust persecution is "to be holy as God is holy" (1:16). This contextualization of Lev 11:44, 19:2, and 20:7 makes most unnatural and illogical the form of theistic determinism we are analyzing. *How can God be the first cause of sin, while being absolutely holy at the same time?* How can God justly cause his people to sin and then pour forth his wrath upon them when they commit the very evils that God supposedly foreordained? Peter directly contradicts this illogical aberration when he calls for his readers "to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (4:2). The disconnect between God and evil relates to the righteousness of God's judgment, which serves as the rationale for Peter's ethical admonitions: "Let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile. And let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Pet 3:10–12, Ps 34:12–13).

We conclude this section with four passages purported to imply God as primary agent of evil:

The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever he wishes. (Prov 21:1)

In him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to his purpose who works all things after the counsel of his will to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of his glory. (Eph 1:11–12)

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. (Rom 8:28)

but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor 2:7–8)

Once again, however, a conclusion of this sort comes at the cost of exegetical precision. God's identity as the first cause of evil is foreign to the contexts of each of these passages, while surrounding biblical theology places the responsibility of sin squarely on human agents. That God has the power to intercede and direct the heart of a king is incontrovertible (as we have seen in the case of Pharaoh), but the theology of Proverbs 21 qualifies with the entirety of Proverbs that the way of wisdom is exclusive of the way of folly: "To do righteousness and justice is desired by the Lord rather than sacrifice. Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, is sin" (Prov 21:4). The inference cited in Prov 21:1 would be valid only if the 853 references to heart (לֵב, לִבָּ) in the OT comprehensively reinforced Talbot's universal application. However, while there are other biblical passages that identify God as sovereignly intervening to direct a person's heart, there are equally numerous passages that describe the heart as exercising freedom separate from divine determination.²⁸ These passages biblically qualify Prov 21:1 and render unsound its universal application.

Similar methodological questions arise from Eph 1:11–12 and Rom 8:28. Was God's purported causation of evil on the theological radar screen of Paul when he wrote Romans and Ephesians? Does Paul's reference to "all things" (τὰ πάντα) intend the universal application that Talbot infers?

Once again, a comprehensive reading of both books suggests that thoughts of this sort were foreign to Paul's intent. Paul's reference to "all things" in Eph 1:10 is written in respect of God's plan of cosmic salvation accomplished through the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, with the result that believers receive the seal of the Holy Spirit and the inheritance of eternal life to the glory of God. God's causation of evil is entirely foreign to Paul's thought. This is evident both in Paul's portrayal of the Ephesians' former lives of sin—"you were dead in

28. Lev 19:17; Num 15:39; Deut 14:26, 15:9, 20:8, 24:15, 29:18; 1 Kgs 2:44; 2 Kgs 10:31; 2 Chr 19:3, 26:16, 29:10, 30:19, 34:27; Ps 84:2; Prov 21:4, 27:19, 28:14; Eccl 11:9; Isa 14:13, 59:13; Ezek 14:4, 16:30.

your trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1; cf. 2:2–7, 4:17–5:21)—and in his portrayal of spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places (Eph 6:10–20), whom God has subjected to the feet of Jesus. Both evils exist in contradistinction to the nature and holy character of God. As in Rom 1:18–32, Paul locates the origin of sin not in causation by God but in the foolish heart of humankind (Eph 4:17–19). Thereafter in Ephesians, Paul's doctrines of God and Christian ethics stand in stark contrast to human fornication: "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. *But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints*" (Eph 5:1–3).²⁹

Romans 8:28 is similarly out of context when construed as an argument for God's causation of evil. In context, the message is not that God works all things, even sensational evil, for ultimate good; rather, the clear message is that "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose." In context, Paul is speaking of believers in Christ who, having been justified by the sacrificial, atoning blood of Christ (Rom 3:23–25), have an invincible eternal salvation that nothing can challenge, because all-powerful God protects his covenant people. Even death will result in reunion with Christ (cf. Phil 1:21). However, the same does not apply to those Paul describes in Rom 1:18–32. Their idolatrous preference for created things rather than the creator results in forms of carnality totally contrary to the holy character of God. Fornication, greed, unrighteousness, gossip, hatred of God, etc. (Rom 1:26f.) do not work together for good. To the contrary, as Paul reminds the readers in Rom 6:21, "the outcome of those things is death."³⁰

The premise that "all things" must be taken literally and universally is in the end simplistic and hermeneutically naive. Using the same premise, a new convert might conclude that they may breathe underwater or defy gravity because of Paul's promise in Phil 4:13, "I can do *all things* through Christ who strengthens me." Obviously, the context of Philippians refers to Paul's ability to minister in poverty or wealth, and "all things" is to be understood in this respect. Similarly, Paul's teaching that love "believes *all things*" and "hopes *all things*" (1 Cor 13:7) is not to be taken lit-

29. That theistic determinism is out of step with Paul's thought is also evident in 1 Cor 12:3, where he affirms that "no one speaking by the spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed.'" God clearly is not the primary agent of blasphemy.

30. The ironically utopian view that all things work together for good in all cases is simply not true. It is not true that evil and hardship always make sufferers stronger according to God's will and purpose. In many cases evil only compounds with time. Experimentation with alcohol and drugs bring on addiction, relational breakdown, psychological dysfunction, and criminal behavior. Rape victims often grow weaker psychologically, not stronger, experiencing paranoia, fear, nightmares, distrust, and compounded problems. Those who return from war often don't return home stronger and healthier for the experience; to the contrary, they often become psychologically disabled, drug dependent, and in the worst cases suicidal.

erally and universally. For love doesn't hope or believe in falsehood or heresy because it does not "rejoice in unrighteousness" (1 Cor 13:6).

Finally, it is hard to see how 1 Cor 2:7–8 identifies God as the primary agent of evil.³¹ For Paul's message is that the "rulers of this age" would *not* have crucified the Lord if they had understood God's mysterious, pre-existent wisdom.³² According to the logic cited above, one would expect that the rulers of this age would have crucified Jesus with even greater resolve if they had known that it was God's predetermined plan that they do so.

These simple observations lead to the conclusion that the above passages do not in truth identify God as the primary agent of evil. Dependence on a single connotation of the dynamic Hebrew word *נָעַר* in the vast literature of the OT is simplistic and misleading. And the consistent application of texts out of context is exegetically fallacious and in discord with comprehensive biblical theology and the holiness of God's character revealed therein. Further, it is problematic that Rom 1:18–32, the closest thing we have to a theodicy in the NT, places the burden of sin squarely on human agents: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom 1:18). Totally foreign to this legitimate crux passage and its exegetical context is any idea that God is the primary agent of the idolatry and moral evil that his wrath punishes. In my judgment, the above passages are better understood as expressing God's wrath, which, though severe, is entirely righteous in view of the sins committed. God does not act in these contexts without provocation as the primary agent of evil.

CONTRADICTORY SCRIPTURES AND THEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

Difficult for theistic determinism are biblical passages that explicitly identify evil as incongruous with God's will and nature. The passages below represent an exegetical fallacy of omission in the writings of Talbot and Piper, who do not reference them at all in their assertions that God is the primary agent of evil. It is also notable that Jonathan Edwards did not reference them in *Freedom of the Will*, and Martin Luther did not refer to them in *The Bondage of the Will*. Grudem refers to Jas 1:13, 1 John 1:5, and Ps 92:15, but without evaluation, development, or qualification.³³ Don Carson is more comprehensive but is surprisingly silent on Jer 19:4–5 (and

31. This was one of the arguments of Talbot in his Taylor University address.

32. "Paul's primary reference here is probably to people such as Pontius Pilate (1 Tim 6:13), who crucified Jesus as a matter of political expediency, but he may also have in mind the cosmic rulers whose will Pilate unwittingly accomplished" (Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 686). See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 233–39.

33. *Systematic Theology*, 339.

par), Ps 5:4, and 1 John 3:5—crucial passages that render difficult his view of compatibilism.³⁴

The Bible is very clear that God *does not* will sin or evil. In a passage familiar to participants in the open theism debates, God emphatically dissociates himself from the specific evil of child sacrifice: “they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter my mind” (Jer 19:4–5; cf. 7:31–32, 32:35, 44:4). The difficulty posed by this passage and its parallels does not diminish with the observation that it is an anthropomorphism. In his study of biblical anthropomorphisms, A. B. Caneday correctly asserts that Jer 7:31–32 is “not an expression of previous ignorance” but “an intensive idiom to express what is unthinkable.”³⁵ And what is unthinkable is the proposal that God ever intended for his people to commit child sacrifice—an incontrovertible biblical revelation that theistic determinists must reject if they are to maintain that God is the primary agent of everything that happens.

More broadly, of course, the ubiquitous prophetic call for repentance seems equally contradictory:

Also I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, sending them again and again, saying: “turn now every man from his evil way, and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to worship them, then you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your forefathers”; but you have not inclined your ear or listened to me. (Jer 35:15)

This difficulty awaits an explanation that the above scholars have yet to provide. Why the call to repentance if human beings are not the primary agents of sin? Why the confession of sins, if human beings are not the primary agents of them (1 John 1:9–10)?

Don Carson’s appeal to a distinction between primary and secondary agents is equally unpersuasive:

To put it bluntly, God stands behind evil in such a way that not even evil takes place outside the bounds of his sovereignty, yet the evil is not morally chargeable to him; it is always chargeable to secondary agents, to secondary causes. On the other hand, God stands behind good in such a way that it not only takes place within the bounds of his sovereignty, but it is always chargeable to him, and only derivatively to secondary agents. In other words, if I sin, I cannot possibly do so outside the bounds of God’s sovereignty (or the many texts already cited have no meaning), but I alone am responsible for that

34. *How Long, O Lord?* references Jas 1:13 (p. 43), 1 John 1:5 (pp. 43, 182), and Isa 5:20 (p. 41) in passing but does not substantively integrate these passages into Carson’s concept of compatibilism, which presupposes a deterministic definition of divine sovereignty.

35. “Veiled Glory: God’s Self-Revelation in Human Likeness—A Biblical Theology of God’s Anthropomorphic Self-Disclosure,” in *Beyond the Bounds* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 194.

sin—or perhaps I and those who tempted me, led me astray, and the like. God is not to be blamed.³⁶

This statement goes beyond the bounds of Scripture and defies basic logic. For while it may be true that Hitler never personally killed a single Jew, no one can question legitimately that he was morally responsible for the atrocious holocaust that he conceived with his henchmen. Hitler is thus universally recognized by all sane people as an evil figure in world history, even though he merely conceived but did not personally implement the holocaust. By analogy, something of this sort would indeed be true of God if he were the "behind the scenes" primary agent of the moral evils that his created secondary agents perform.

Properly understood, the Bible does not describe God in this fashion. Jeremiah 32:35, for example, directly contradicts the primary/secondary agency theory: "And they built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Benhinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered my mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." Here God himself removes all doubt that he did not conceive this sin, nor did he cause Judah to sin. This exegetical problem is in my judgment insurmountable for theistic determinists. That they do not address it and its parallels at all in their arguments is inexcusable.

Furthermore, many passages are expressive of God's disassociation from and antipathy toward evil: "The Rock! His work is perfect, for all his ways are just; A God of faithfulness and *without injustice*, righteous and upright is He" (Deut 32:4); "The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against evil doers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth" (Ps 34:15–16); "To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and *there is no unrighteousness in him*" (Ps 92:15; cf. Ps 52:5–9); "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isa 5:20; cf. Mic 3:2); "Hate evil you who love the Lord" (Ps 97:10); "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil" (Prov 8:13); "Hate evil, love good" (Amos 5:15); "You are *not* a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; *no* evil dwells with you" (Ps 5:4); "Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and you cannot look on wickedness with favor" (Hab 1:13a);³⁷ "let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate" (Zech 8:17).

These passages await plausible, methodologically astute explanation by theistic determinists. How can they be logical and true if God is the

36. *How Long, O Lord*, 189.

37. Carson justifiably appeals to Hab 1:13b to argue that this passage holds in tension God's sovereignty with human responsibility (*How Long, O Lord?* 182); however, he does not inform his readers of the entire theological context of Habakkuk, in which God uses the Chaldeans to punish Judah for her sin. The text in no way speaks of God's unprovoked causation of evil. Jeremiah 32, which explains the exact same historical event (the Chaldean invasion of Judah), does so in terms of God's judgment against sins that "never entered his mind" (32:35).

primary agent of evil? Are they not part of the "all Scripture" that is inspired by God and therefore authoritative for orthodox faith and practice? Perhaps Reformed systematic theologian Louis Berkhof was correct to conclude: "And for that reason all those deterministic views which represent sin as a necessity inherent in the very nature of things should be rejected. They by implication make God the author of sin, and are contrary, not only to Scripture, but also to the voice of conscience, which testifies to the responsibility of man."³⁸

Further, these references evidence that *רָעָה* does indeed have a broad range of connotations in the OT, some of which are expressly not congruous with exhaustive divine causation. The NT offers the same challenge. "God is light, and in him there is no darkness *at all*" (1 John 1:5). "And you know that he appeared in order to take away sins; and in him there is *no sin*" (1 John 3:5). The logic of John 3:21, "But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God," presupposes that there are those who practice falsehood, who reside in darkness, and whose deeds were *not* wrought in God (cf. John 3:19).

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL PROBLEM

The revelation of God in the person of Jesus is also problematic for deterministic theodicy. For one would expect that Jesus would reveal the Father to be the primary agent of evil if in fact this is true. One would expect Jesus to reveal this side of God's character because of who Jesus is: Immanuel, "God with us," "the exact representation of God's nature," the one the Nicene Creed affirms as "God of God; Light of Light; Very God of Very God . . . Being of one substance with the Father." One would also expect that Jesus, as the incarnation of God, would cause evil to bring about good, if such is God's universal practice wherever evil occurs. It is self-evident, however, that just the opposite is revealed in the NT. Jesus did not stimulate sin to work through it; he rebuked sin, forgave it in the lives of repentant believers, raised ethical standards for resisting it (Matt 5:21-48), and atoned for it through his voluntary sacrificial death. Jesus didn't corrupt or injure; he cleansed and healed. He did not murder; he resuscitated the dead. And he placed the responsibility of sin squarely on sinners without ever envisioning an eventual "greater good" for the evils he rebuked; e.g., "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6); "Because of your hardness of heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way" (Matt 19:8);³⁹ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make

38. *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 220.

39. The logical extension of theistic determinism is that God has to be the primary agent of divorce, even though Malachi explicitly states that God hates it (Mal 2:16). Furthermore, the

one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Matt 23:15).

Jesus' teaching on divorce is particularly important to this discussion because it clearly distinguishes God's holy intent for marriage "in the beginning" by contrast to the human inclination to divorce, which Jesus states as being the consequence of the hardness of the human heart. The qualification "from the beginning it has *not* been this way" (Matt 19:8) eliminates God as the primary agent of the sin that leads to divorce. Only the most awkward eisegesis can eliminate this difficulty, especially in light of Mal 2:16. The same holds true for a common-sense interpretation of 1 John 3:7–8: "the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned *from the beginning*." It being the case that Gen 3 and Rev 12 both depict Satan as primordially initiating sin, it is difficult to comprehend why one would identify God as sin's primary agent unless to accommodate a preconceived system of thought.

Moreover, the philosophy of theistic determinism is altogether absent from Jesus' view of salvation history. The parables of the vine-growers (Mark 12:1–11), the ten virgins (Matt 25:1–13), the talents (Matt 25:14–30), the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46), and so on, depict a world view in which human beings are responsible for their actions and are judged accordingly. Jesus' are not "soft" teachings but severe warnings of the judgment awaiting those who reject God's emissaries and God's Son. Totally foreign are ideas of God acting behind or within disobedience, laziness, or foolishness for an undisclosed mysterious ultimate good. Jesus portrays God not as the primary agent of disobedience but as the primary agent of judgment—those who reject his emissaries are cast out of the vineyard, the lazy are not allowed to enter the banquet of the bridegroom, the one with one talent loses his to the one with ten, and the sheep are separated from the goats because of the things they have not done.

Equally awkward is the logical conclusion that God, as primary agent of everything, must be the primary agent of heresy or what the apostle John referred to as the teachings of antichrists (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). Was God the primary agent of the teaching that denies that Jesus is the Christ or the teaching that Jesus was not born in the flesh? Is God in any way, shape, or form *anti*-Christ?

Furthermore, Jesus' statement on light/darkness renders unbiblical Jonathan Edward's famous comparison of God and evil to light and darkness—i.e., that evil is the absence of God as darkness is the absence of light.⁴⁰ By contrast, the depiction in the Bible is one of light encountering

context places blame for the divorces mentioned squarely on Israelites, who have been responsible for dealing treacherously with their wives (Mal 2:14). Are we to conclude that God was the primary agent of something he hates? An idea such as this would be totally foreign to the biblical context of Malachi and the teaching of Jesus in Matt 19.

40. *Freedom of the Will*, 404.

the darkness and the darkness rejecting the light: "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Evil here is not a passive inanimate reality—the absence of good. It is active, animate, and directly adversarial to God, who is present in the form of Jesus. Present-day uncritical wholesale adoption of neo-Edwardsean theodicy is an unfortunate departure from the grammatical-historical-critical method of exegesis and the unifying discipline of biblical theology.

Hebrews thus professes: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, *yet without sin*" (Heb 4:15). In all respects, Jesus' sinless nature is the exact representation, the "character" (Heb 1:3) of God's sinless nature. We cannot overstate the vitality of this Christological truth. Atonement with *holy*, immortal God is only possible through union with the holy, incarnate Son of God (Gal 2:17–20). In my opinion, a weakness of theistic determinism is that its presupposition of exhaustive divine causation requires an un-Christlike definition of holiness—if *God* is the primary agent of evil. For it cannot be true that holiness is the semantic equivalent of sinlessness (as exemplified by Jesus/"God with us") if holy God is the author and primary agent of sin. Thus, one might argue that extreme theistic determinism requires a logical impossibility—that God can be holy and unholy at the same time.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

John Piper asserts in a vignette entitled "To Show That the Worst Evil Is Meant by God for Good" that "the heart of the Bible is not an explanation of where evil came from, but a demonstration of how God enters into it and turns it for the very opposite—everlasting righteousness and joy."⁴¹ Piper is clearly correct if he is referring to the event of the incarnation when Jesus entered the dark world of sin and became sin, in the sense that Jesus suffered God's punishment for the sins of humankind in his substitutionary atoning sacrifice (2 Cor 5:21, Rom 3:21–26).⁴² But this message is

41. *The Passion of Christ*, 118.

42. 2 Corinthians 5:21 has proven to be a difficult passage for commentators to explain perhaps because of its pre-Pauline traditional origin in the conceptual background of Isa 53:10. "In part Paul may have in mind the thought he expresses in Rom 8.3: God sent his Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh.' . . . Christ became identified with sinful humanity, exchanging the situation proper to his own sinfulness for the condition consequent upon human sin" (Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [London: T. & T. Clark, 2004], 1:439, 442). Or, as C. K. Barrett puts it, Christ became sin in the sense that "he came to stand in that relationship with God which normally is the result of sin, estranged from God and the object of his wrath" (*A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [New York: Harper & Row, 1973], 180). Murray Harris concludes, "in v. 21a Paul is not saying that at the crucifixion the sinless Christ became in some sense a sinner, yet he is affirming more than that Christ became a sin offering or even a sin bearer. In a sense beyond human comprehension, God treated Christ as 'sin,' aligning him so totally with sin and its dire consequences

very different from the argument that God stimulates or initiates sin for a mysterious, unrevealed higher good. This kind of reasoning is simply not true to Scripture, where God works *through righteousness* in the atoning ministry of Jesus: "that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign *through righteousness* to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21). The redemption model is a corrective. Christ the redeemer entered into the crime scene not as its cause but as its solution and eventual judge. Jesus did not come as an agent of sin in any respect; rather, he "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Gal 1:4). For those not experiencing God's grace through faith in Christ, their plight is divine judgment and a sentence of guilt for the sins of which the Bible specifies they are guilty (Matt 12:36–37, 25:45–46; Rom 2:6; Rev 20:13, 22:12). In the end, it is indeed hard to understand why justification would be necessary at all, if Satan and humanity were not the primary agents of sin and thus in need of real justification.

Of course, the argument can be made that we are to accept God as the primary agent of evil, counterintuitive as it is, in view of the fact of God's transcendence—that God's ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts, and we look through a mirror dimly. This seems to be the foundation for Talbot's appeal to category mistakes—that we are wrong to apply the same categorizations to our relationship with God that we apply to human relationships.

To attribute moral evil-doing to God merely because he ordains and brings into being what is evil is to make that "category mistake" again; it is to try to think of the relation between God and his world in a way that inevitably smuggles in some illicit creature-to-creature analogy. . . . God's will is the ultimate explanation for all of the evil we find in this world, but to the degree that some evil event has come about because of some sort of moral wrongdoing, blame for that wrongdoing should be assigned to some creature and not to God.⁴³

Celebrating the theological truth of Isa 55:8–9, we should at the same time affirm that the God revealed in Scripture is not after the deistic model. He is not so transcendent that we are uninformed of his nature, especially the attributes he has repeatedly emphasized in his word and in his incarnation. Is it not true that God in his word has commanded us to be holy *as he is holy* and to be perfect *as he is perfect*? These imperatives presuppose a human knowledge of God's holiness. However one interprets these biblical imperatives, the impression is difficult to avoid that God's holiness is *not incongruous* with the holiness that he desires in the lives of his people—there is no double standard. God's holiness is sinlessness as revealed in

that from God's vantage point he became indistinguishable from sin itself" (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 454).

43. "True Freedom," 99–101.

God's law, the life of Jesus, and the fruits of the *Holy Spirit* by contrast to the sins of the flesh (Gal 5:16–26). The revelation that God's ways are not our ways fully supports this truth. In order for theistic determinism to be true, Scripture would have to affirm that our ways *are* God's ways, which Isa 55:8–9 categorically contradicts.

Soteriologically, it is this ultimate accomplishment that Jesus' sacrifice achieved—the forgiveness and recreation of fallen sinners back into the holy likeness of God. Hence, we may say with confidence on the basis of God's revelation that we do not look through a glass dimly when it comes to the subject of God's holiness, justice, righteousness, and love. No, these attributes of God have been specially revealed through God's word and exactly through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the exact representation of God's nature. In each of these respects, sinful evil is antithetical to divine holiness. To say otherwise would be a direct violation of God's admonition, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil" (Isa 5:20).

The argument that God is the primary agent of evil is further flawed by its inability to answer its own inevitable questions—how can humankind be responsible for its sin when God is its primary agent? How can God be just and not capricious, when, as the one who ordains evil, he causes the breaking of his own law? How can God be just, not to mention loving, when he eternally punishes those who commit sins that he himself predetermined? How can God fall short of his own glory or willingly cause his creation to fall short of his glory? How can God be consistent with his own nature, if he foreordains blasphemy of himself? Talbot, to his credit, admits that he cannot explain these mysteries. And Grudem confesses the same: "Calvinists must say that they do not know the answer to the following questions: 1. Exactly how God can ordain that we do evil willingly, and yet God not be blamed for evil. 2. Exactly how God can cause us to choose something willingly."⁴⁴

But appeals such as these attribute to mystery what is not mysterious. The Bible is very clear that sin entered the world through humankind: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). Categorically, this sin is opposite the obedience of Christ: "For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). The lucid confession of David in Ps 51 is that God is indeed just in judging because it was David himself who was responsible for and guilty of his sin: "Against you, you only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified when you speak, and blameless when you judge."

Perhaps it is the theistic determinist who has made the "categorical mistake." In identifying God as the primary agent of evil, the theistic determinist has attributed to holy God what is categorically unholy—

44. *Systematic Theology*, 350.

namely, Satanic (1 John 3:8; Rev 12; Gen 3) and human (Gen 3, Rom 5) acts of rebellion against God. It is undeniable that the Bible attributes evil to Satan's rebellion against God and humankind's choice of darkness rather than light: "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness; for *their* deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest *his* deeds should be exposed." Are we to infer from John 3:20 that God as primary agent of evil must hate the light—for everyone who does evil hates the light?

More biblical in my judgment are the arguments advocated by philosophers Alvin Plantinga, J. P. Moreland, and William Lane Craig: "The true problem of evil is the problem of *our* evil."⁴⁵ Satan, Adam, and Eve were the primary agents, not God (Rev 12:7–9; Gen 3; Rom 1, 5).⁴⁶ And now, products of the fall, we today responsibly bear the consequences of sin, as Augustine attested: "all have sinned in that first man, because all were in him at that time when he sinned, and that from then on sin is inherited through birth" (*Contra duas Epistolas Pelagianorum* 4.4, 7).

THEODICY WITHIN THE EVANGELICAL REFORMED TRADITION

The Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Confession, and the Westminster Confession of Faith impress me as nuanced, more-biblical treatments of the problem.

The Augsburg Confession (1530):

Article XIX: Of the Cause of Sin

Of the Cause of Sin they teach that, although God does create and preserve nature, yet the cause of sin is the will of the wicked, that is, of the devil and ungodly men; which will, unaided of God, turns itself from God, as Christ says John 8, 44: When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own.

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563):

Q. 6. Where, then, does this corruption of human nature come from?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden; whereby our human life is so poisoned that we are all conceived and born into a state of sin."

45. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian World-view* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 551. Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

46. Again, even Martin Luther identifies Satan as responsible for the original causation of evil in *The Bondage of the Will*: "Thus God, finding Satan's will evil, not creating it so (it became so by Satan's sinning and God's withdrawing), carries it along by His own operation and moves it where He wills; although Satan's will does not cease to be evil in virtue of this movement of God" (p. 206).

Q. 8. "But are we so perverted that we are altogether unable to do good and prone to evil?"

A. "Yes, unless we are born again through the Spirit of God."

Q. 9. "Is not God unjust in requiring of man in his Law what he cannot do?"

A. "No, for God so created man that he could do it. But man, upon the instigation of the devil, by deliberate disobedience, has cheated himself and all his descendants out of these gifts."

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1643–46):

Chapter III: Of God's Eternal Decree

1. "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."

2. "Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions."

To be sure, these statements are not Scripture and do indeed require interpretations of their own; however, they are sufficiently flexible to account for the full breadth of biblical revelation without undermining God's supremacy, God's holiness, or human responsibility. Unquestionably, they represent the Evangelical reformed tradition and not an extreme that some might appraise as "reformed fundamentalism." In the same spirit, I find John Piper's language compelling when he echoes Jonathan Edwards with qualification and constraint:

Edwards answers, "If by 'the author of sin,' be meant the sinner, the agent, or the actor of sin, or the doer of a wicked thing . . . it would be a reproach and blasphemy, to suppose God to be the author of sin. In this sense I utterly deny God to be the author of sin." But, he argues, willing that sin exist in the world is not the same as sinning. God does not commit sin in willing that there be sin. God has established a world in which sin will indeed necessarily come to pass by God's permission, but not by his "positive agency."

The challenge for Piper and others of this school of thought is to reconcile this statement with the identification of God as the primary agent of every evil. Does this quotation not contradict those quoted earlier? Can Piper credibly define foreordination, first cause, and primary agency with the result that God is not responsible for sin while at the same time postulating that human beings have no free will whatsoever?⁴⁷

47. Piper seems to reject all forms of free will in his construct of biblical theology: "Packer is too good a biblical scholar to think there ever was such a thing as 'free will' taught in the scripture. Thus the whole conversation between him and myself can proceed on the cordial

I am not convinced that theistic determinism accurately represents orthodoxy or even a consensus within the Reformed tradition itself. It goes without saying, of course, that determinism does not represent the early Church Fathers—as Calvin himself noted—or the theology of contemporary Evangelicalism as represented by J. I. Packer and Thomas Oden.⁴⁸

Though Talbot claims that his view represents the historical consensus of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther,⁴⁹ Calvin, and Edwards, I have found only Edwards to compare accurately—though one has to wonder how convicting "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" would be if heard on the premise that God is angry at the sins he predetermined.⁵⁰ Aquinas does indeed express the conclusion that God is the cause of evil, but in distinction to Edwards, he does so with qualifications that today are not widely recalled. For Aquinas does indeed write "Again, when things are arranged in series so that each depends on the other, the last depends on the first. But God is the cause of man's free will and man's free will is the cause of sin. Therefore, God is the cause of sin" (Q 79 pt. 3 p. 205). Yet, Aquinas goes on to qualify:

When things in the series are not only dependent but subordinate so that nothing escapes the series, then the last effect can be traced to the first cause. But if an intermediate agent departs from the chain of command, the ultimate results cannot be traced to the primary cause, nor can the master be blamed when the servant does something contrary to his command. Thus, when one freely chooses to go against the command of God by sinning, this cannot be attributed to God as to a cause. (Q 79 pt. 2.3 p. 209)

agreement that free will is an unbiblical notion that is not part of the antimony because it is not part of revelation" ("A Response to J. I. Packer on the So-Called Antimony between the Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility" [cited May 27, 2009]. Online: www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1976/1581_A_Response_to_JI_Packer_on_the_SoCalled_Antimony_Between_the_Sovereignty_of_God_and_Human_Responsibility/). In this respect, Piper distances himself from Grudem, whose theology finds room for significant free will: "But we are nonetheless free in the greatest sense that any creature of God could be free—we make *willing* choices, choices that have *real effects*. We are aware of no restraints on our will from God when we make decisions. We must insist that we have the power of *willing* choice; otherwise we will fall into the error of fatalism or determinism and thus conclude that our choices do not matter, or that we cannot really make willing choices" (*Systematic Theology*, 331). Emphasis is Grudem's.

48. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 2.2.9. Calvin, however, was critical of the early church fathers for what he saw as their ambiguity on this subject; J. I. Packer and T. Oden, *One Faith: The Evangelical Tradition* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 66: "By his sinful free choice Adam rebelled against God, fell from his original innocence and purity, and received a fallen and sinful nature (Rom 5:12). Each human being today is born with this sinful nature (Ps 51:5, Gal 3:22) and by his own sinful deeds has become guilty before God (Rom 3:11–23)."

49. For Augustine, see n. 58, p. 214. For Luther, see n. 47, p. 209.

50. Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 399: "That it is most certainly so, that God is in such a manner the disposer and orderer of sin, is evident, if any credit is to be given to the Scripture; as well as because it is impossible in the nature of things to be otherwise."

Aquinas's logic represents Scripture well in this respect. In the succession of creation recorded in Genesis, holy God appraises all of creation, including humankind, as very good prior to the fall (Gen 1:31). Only after the fall does the succession of sin enter history. Totally foreign to Gen 3 or Rom 5 is any idea that God caused Satan to seduce Adam into sin. In view of God's eventual judgment of sin as injustice, more reasonable is the inference that God created free will as good and then responded in wrath when Satan and humankind used what was inherently good for disobedient, evil purposes. Etienne Gilson's logic is insightful in this respect:

Being deprived of its hands is a serious loss to the human body, so hands are good and useful things; but the man who commits criminal or shameful acts with them makes bad use of them. A human body without feet would obviously be very imperfect, but a person who uses his feet to go and injure another or to disgrace himself makes bad use of them. What is true of these members is true of all the other parts as well, of the eyes, for example; and this is the reason why the same may be said of the will. In itself, the will is good, because without it no one could lead an upright life. It comes to us, therefore from God, and we should find fault with those who use it badly, not with Him Who gives it to us.⁵¹

Further, Aquinas does indeed state, "On the other hand, a sinful action is free will in motion. And St. Augustine says, *The will of God is the cause of every movement*. Therefore, God's will is the cause of every sin" (p. 209). Yet again Aquinas qualifies: "Man is accountable not only for his actions, but also for what is missing from his actions, for even though he does not principally intend it, he can be subject to God even when he is not. Hence, man is the cause of sin. But God is the cause of the action, a causality, however, which in no way extends to defect in that action. Therefore, he is not the cause of sin itself" (79.3.2).

These quotations (like all quotations) are inadequate representations of the comprehensive thought of a sophisticated thinker; however, they do accurately represent the complexity of Aquinas's "yes" and "no" perspective on the subject of the causation of evil. Bald simplistic appeals to Aquinas misrepresent his comprehensive thought.

Closer examination reveals that Augustine never retracted from free will as the cause of evil.⁵² Anselm appealed to free will and to logic.⁵³

51. *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine* (New York: Random House, 1960), 146. According to the classic position, many would also add that in truth it would be impossible to love God without the free will to do so, because love is in essence a voluntary act and responsibility.

52. In response to the Pelagian heresy, Augustine qualified in his later retractions that though free will was responsible for sin, free will was not sufficient in its fallen state to contribute to one's salvation: "Then I proceeded to speak of the wretchedness most justly inflicted upon sinners, from which they can be freed only by God's grace; since man could fall by will, that is by free choice, he could not rise again" (*Retractions* 6).

53. "Because the apostate angel [Satan] and the first man [Adam] sinned by their own choice which was so free that it could not be compelled by any other thing to sin, each of them sinned by free choice. Therefore, each of them is justly blamed because in spite of having this

Luther, though coming close to theistic determinism, ultimately identified Satan as evil's cause.⁵⁴ And Calvin, without compromising his concept of God's foreknowledge,⁵⁵ explicitly attributed sin to the fall of Adam:

Now away with those persons who dare write God's name upon their faults, because we declare that men are vicious by nature! They perversely search out God's handiwork in their own pollution, when they ought rather to have sought it in that unimpaired and uncorrupted nature of Adam. Our destruction, therefore, comes from the guilt of our flesh, not from God, inasmuch as we have perished solely because we have degenerated from our original condition.⁵⁶ (cf. Jas 1:13–14)

Calvin argues that man's will, held captive by sin, pursues evil by nature as a consequence of Adam's fall. This is Calvin's doctrine of original sin as he originally expressed it in book 2, chap. 1 of *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. With this reasoning I agree.

Theistic determinism can't help but presume that evil really isn't malevolent, if God is the primary agent of everything and if the ultimate purpose of everything is the glorification of God. But this again begs the question of God's judgment and justice and the necessity of Jesus' death. If we are not the primary agents of our sins, why did Jesus die a propitiatory death to appease God's wrath? Why God's wrath at all?

freedom of choice, each sinned freely and out of no necessity and without being compelled by anything else. However, each sinned by his own choice, which was free; but neither sinned by means of that in virtue of which his choice was free" (*De Libertate Arbitrii* chap. 2); "Hence, if God were to remove (the oft-mentioned) uprightness from someone, He would not will him to will what He wills him to will" (*De Libertate Arbitrii* chap. 8). Anselm's observation relates directly to Scripture. How can God be the primary agent of our immorality if 1 Thess 4:3 is true: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification"?

54. "Thus God, finding Satan's will evil, not creating it so (it became so by Satan's sinning and God's withdrawing), carries it along by His own operation and moves it where He wills; although Satan's will does not cease to be evil in virtue of this movement of God" (*The Bondage of the Will*, 206).

55. "Nor ought it to seem absurd when I say, that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also at his own pleasure arranged it. For as it belongs to his wisdom to foreknow all future events, so it belongs to his power to rule and govern them by his hand. This question, like others, is skillfully explained by Augustine: 'Let us confess with the greatest benefit, what we believe with the greatest truth, that the God and Lord of all things, who made all things very good, both foreknew that evil was to arise out of good, and knew that it belonged to his most omnipotent goodness to bring good out of evil rather than not permit evil to be, and so ordained the life of angels and men as to show in it, first, what free-will could do; and, secondly, what the benefit of his grace and his righteous judgment could do' (August. *Enchir. Ad Laurent.*)" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.23.7).

56. *Institutes*, 2.1.10. This language accurately represents Calvin's comprehensive treatment of original sin, which consistently places the burden of evil on human and satanic agents and not God (cf. 2.1.4: "Indeed, Augustine speaks rightly when he declares that pride was the beginning of all evils"; 2.1.10: "We have, therefore, no reason to complain except against ourselves. Scripture has diligently noted this fact. For Ecclesiastes says: 'This I know, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many devices' (Ch. 7:29). Obviously, man's ruin is to be ascribed to man alone; for he, having acquired righteousness by God's kindness, has by his own folly sunk into vanity").

CONCLUSION

In the end, one has to decide for one's self where all of this leads us. We are all responsible for our theologies and for what we teach others. As Paul writes: "Each of us shall give a word concerning himself to God" (Rom 14:12). I personally find the arguments of Talbot, Grudem, Piper, and Carson exegetically, theologically, and logically deficient. Their versions of compatibilism presuppose a metaphysical and not comprehensively biblical definition of God's sovereignty. They force a disconnect between their construct of God and the eschatological portrayal of God found in the book of Revelation, where God's sovereign character is comprehensively holy (Rev 4:8) and where God is not the agent of evil but the agent of judgment and the elimination of evil (Rev 20:10–15). This eschatological punitive judgment would be unjust apart from the guilty party's responsibility for their own sin (as both Augustine and Anselm argued).⁵⁷ Difficult for theistic determinism is the fact that the Bible explains hell, however interpreted, as God's punishment for willful sin (Luke 13:27–28; Matt 25:14–46; Rev 20:11–15, 22:12).

More biblical, theologically cohesive, and logically valid is the view that God created free agents in his image with wills capable of making responsible, first-cause decisions either in faithful obedience to God's will or in direct rebellion against him (Deut 30:15–20). Humanity's sin makes valid and just God's wrath, thereby necessitating Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as the exclusive means of atonement with sinless, holy God. Ours is a Romans 1 world that has as its only hope the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

It being the case that God is our Father, it may be insightful to consider that as a human father is responsible for bringing a child into the world and yet is not responsible for the ills that that child eventually commits—we do not convict parents for their children's crimes—so God as creator is our first cause, but he is not in any respect the primary agent of our acts of disobedience against him. He created us but he did not force our sins. To the contrary, God is a good shepherd who leads "in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." To be sure, God is a refiner's fire to be feared, and he is indeed the exclusive final word in judgment, but it cannot be said validly on the basis of Scripture that he is the primary agent of evil. That ignominious distinction belongs to Satan and to us: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1 John 2:16).

57. "Certainly, for evil could not have come into being without a cause. However, if you ask what the cause may be, I cannot say, since there is no one cause; rather, each evil man is the cause of his own evil-doing. If you doubt this, then listen to what we said above: evil deeds are punished by the justice of God. It would not be just to punish evil deeds if they were not done willfully" (*De libero arbitrio voluntatis* [*On Free Choice of the Will*; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964], 3). Augustine affirmed this logic in his retractions. Similarly, Anselm: "You do not doubt that the Devil sinned, since he was not able to be unjustly damned by a just God" (*De Casu Diaboli*, chap. 4).