

# JESUS CHRIST AND ESCHATOLOGY:

A CHRISTIAN SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

## Introduction

About a month ago, an acquaintance of mine from high school, Brian,<sup>1</sup> was jogging early in the morning when he was hit by a drunk driver. No one knows exactly how it happened because Brian was left to die on the sidewalk while the perpetrator, whom the police say was probably drunk, sped off into the early morning darkness. Brian was only 25, with his whole life ahead of him. From what I am told, he loved God, his friends, and his life. He was quiet, humble, kind, and gifted. In short, he did not deserve what happened to him that Saturday morning. Yet, he is gone, and the drunk driver who killed him is still free. Hundreds of his friends came from across the United States to attend his funeral, and I am sure they were all asking a similar question to mine: “Why would God allow this evil to happen?”

The picture may be further complicated by adding more details. Brian was in the midst of changing careers, and had sought God’s will for his life. He had returned home to see his friends before heading off for his new endeavor. He was seeking to follow God, and yet God had seemingly led him back to his home town for an early morning rendezvous with a drunk driver.<sup>2</sup> How do Christians make sense of tragedies like this one? In other words, if God is perfectly good and omnipotent, then why did this evil happen?

These are the types of questions that Christians must answer as they encounter suffering in the world. Yet, this essay will contend that if Christians only explain the reasons behind moral evils<sup>3</sup> like this one, they will have failed to give a solution to the problem. Explanations

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<sup>1</sup> His name has been changed.

<sup>2</sup> This point will be important in the fourth section of this paper on Open Theism and God’s sovereignty.

<sup>3</sup> The emphasis on moral evil will be explained in the second section.

for evil's existence simply restate the nature of the problem: evil exists, and we do not like it. A proper solution to the problem must explain how evil can be overcome *and* guarantee the outcome. Moreover, a good solution will give Brian's death eschatological meaning. In this essay, I will argue that the strength of Christianity's engagement with evil lies in its ability to bring meaning, redemption, and hope to seemingly pointless tragedies like Brian's death. In other words, Christianity's main concern is not to justify every instance of evil through philosophical argumentation and theodicy,<sup>4</sup> though doing so can be a rewarding exercise in the context of the Christian worldview. Instead, Christianity's unique claim is that although moral evil enters by the free actions of human beings, God is actively working to overcome evil and give it meaning through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, I will argue that the solution to evil ultimately lies in Christianity's eschatological claim, namely, its claim that God is actively working all things to the good of those who love God, so that one day they will be adopted as sons, their bodies will be redeemed, and all wrongs judged. At the basis of this claim is God's sovereign guarantee that God will bring it to pass.

In order to substantiate this thesis, this essay will proceed in four stages. First, it will be necessary to explain why the evil of Brian's death is not logically inconsistent with a Christian worldview. To show this, a Christian explanation for the origin of evil, including the evil of Brian's death, will be offered. However, since explaining the origin of evil is by no means a solution to the problem, I will move to the second step: showing how the Christian God has intervened to fight evil. Yet, knowing that God is fighting against evil is only half of the solution. Thus, a third piece is needed to solve the puzzle. This piece is Christian eschatology.

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<sup>4</sup> Theodicy carries different connotations for different philosophers. I use it in the same sense as the Christian philosopher William Hasker: "theodicy is an attempt to propose candidates for the reasons that justify God in permitting one or another form of evil in the world." William Hasker, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

In fact, I will argue that eschatology is perhaps the most important aspect of the Christian solution. In order to make this clear, the fourth stage will engage an Open Theist<sup>5</sup> perspective on God's nature to show that without a definite eschatology based in some degree on God's sovereign knowledge of the future, hope in the Christian solution to the problem of evil is ungrounded.

## Exploring the Problem of Moral Evil

The<sup>6</sup> problem of evil is broad and takes many forms. It is often divided into two types: the logical problem of evil and the evidential problem of evil. Furthermore, the discussion of evil can be divided into problems of natural evil (suffering caused by the laws of nature), moral evil (suffering caused by the actions of human agents), gratuitous evil (evil that seems completely unnecessary on any scheme), and the ontology of evil (whether or not evil really exists), to name a few.<sup>7</sup> To avoid speaking in broad generalities, this essay will focus on the problem of moral evil, specifically as it concerns the example of Brian and the drunk driver.

The logical problem of evil posed by my example is strictly concerned with whether or not it is logically possible to assert that the evil of Brian's death exists in a world supposedly created by an omnipotent, good God, i.e. the Christian God. While various defenses have been put forward throughout the centuries, it is widely held that Alvin Plantinga's "Free Will

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<sup>5</sup> Open Theism is a relatively new perspective on the nature of God's interaction with the world. Simply put, open theists believe "God manages the world without enjoying the degree of control over and the foreknowledge of contingent events that have traditionally been ascribed to him [sic] . . . God (or anyone) [cannot] know the future definitely and exhaustively." Clark H. Pinnock "Constrained by Love: Divine Self-Restraint according to Open Theism." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 2007), *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 14, 2011), 149.

<sup>6</sup> According to the theologian John Feinberg, "there is no such thing as *the* problem of evil." Instead, he distinguishes a variety of problems. Nevertheless, I believe it is safe to proceed under the assumption that *the* problem is that there are many problems due to evil. John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1994), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Feinberg lists others. *Ibid.*, 15-18.

Defense” has sufficiently explained the logical problem, or at least diminished its strength.<sup>8</sup> As its title suggests, the “Free Will Defense” claims that the existence of evil is compatible with the omnipotent, good God of Christianity because of the nature of free will. In short, it posits that if God created humans with freedom to make their own choices, then any evil that results from their free choices is the fault of humans, not God.

So in the case of Brian, Plantinga would claim that it is logically consistent to say that God is good and omnipotent, yet did not prevent the evil resulting in Brian’s death. This statement can be made on the grounds that because God determined at creation to give humans free will, it is always a possibility that they will use their freedom to bring about evil. The drunk driver presumably chose to drink excessively, get in the car, drive, and not stop after hitting Brian. This event was possible because God had already determined not to coerce the driver to act against his or her will, and to uphold the consequences of the driver’s free actions.

Nevertheless, it may still be objected that a good God would intervene whenever possible to prevent moral evil if God knew that the evil did not serve some greater good. So in the case of Brian’s death, if no greater good (such as the repentance and salvation of the driver) resulted, then God was not justified in allowing the evil, and the idea of the Christian God must be modified. At this point, two replies are possible. The first would be to claim that is impossible for humans to know and judge the greater good, so we may simply trust that God has ordered this event to bring about some greater good.<sup>9</sup> But this answer will probably fail to convince those who are already skeptical of Christian claims. The second response would be to qualify God’s omnipotence by claiming that God cannot do the logically impossible, namely, to

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<sup>8</sup> William L. Rowe, ed., *God and the Problem of Evil* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 76.

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the claim of Romans 8:28 that “for those who love God all things work together for good” supports this argument in the case of evils perpetrated against Christians.

arbitrarily go against God's own decrees to honor human freedom whenever such freedom threatens to bring about evil. This response may also fail to satisfy the skeptic, but it nevertheless frees Christians from any claim that their worldview is logically inconsistent.

Yet, even though the "Free Will Defense" may give an answer to the logical problem, the evidential problem remains. The evidential problem is not concerned with logic as much as it is concerned with probability. Simply put, the evidential problem of evil claims that all of the seemingly gratuitous evil in the world makes it *improbable* that the omnipotent, good God of Christianity exists. Yet, to echo the words of the Christian philosopher William Hasker, it may be asked, "[I]mprobable for whom?"<sup>10</sup> Hasker, who draws upon the work of Alvin Plantinga, asserts that the probability of the Christian God's existence will depend largely on the probability of the initial propositions used to support God's existence, which will vary depending on who is making the propositions. In other words, an atheist and a Christian will arrive at different probabilities due to their differing assumptions. Nevertheless, Hasker essentially argues that it is incumbent upon the Christian to give the atheist good grounds for changing the probabilities, i.e. to construct a theodicy. Plantinga, on the other hand, is content with the unresolvable nature of the evidential problem, thinking that a theodicy that gives Christian reasons for evil will remain unconvincing to a skeptic.<sup>11</sup> Applying his argument to Brian's case, Plantinga would say that even though reasons may be given by Christians for the evil of Brian's death, those reasons would probably be rejected by skeptics with different worldviews. Plantinga makes a good point here: the Christian's responsibility lies mainly in showing the logical consistency of Christianity's truth claims (and it may be added, preaching the gospel, which is nothing less than

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<sup>10</sup> William Hasker, *Providence*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil," *Philosophical Studies* 35 (1979), 1-53, referenced in Hasker, *Providence*, 24 and 41.

the eschatological solution to the problem. This will be explored later). It is not necessary for Christians to build theodicies and debate probability, though these things may be fruitful.<sup>12</sup>

Plantinga's explanations for the logical and evidential problems of evil are confirmed by the biblical narrative, as well as the early church fathers. In the Genesis story of origins, God declared that everything God had made was "very good."<sup>13</sup> Evil is nowhere to be found in God's created world. Yet, God planted a tree in the Garden of Eden that contained the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>14</sup> So certainly, the possibility of evil existed. When Adam and Eve freely chose to eat from this tree, creation was "subjected to futility."<sup>15</sup> In Romans 5:12, Paul claims that through Adam's trespass, sin and death entered the created order and spread to all humans because all humans sin. Thus, it would seem that the biblical account of creation and human sin explains moral evil along the same lines as Plantinga – evil is a result of the free actions of human beings, not God's "good" creative act.

Not only can a rough outline of Plantinga's "Free Will Defense" be found in Scripture, but it can also be found in some of the early church fathers. Writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, Origen argues that "the creator granted to the minds that he [sic] made the power of free and voluntary movement, so that the good which was in them might become their own through ... their own free-will. But sloth and weariness in the preservation of good supervened ... and so the withdrawal from good began."<sup>16</sup> For Origen, evil entered the creation because humans did not

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<sup>12</sup> For a great collection of essays on theodicy and the evidential problem of evil, see Rowe, *God and the Problem of Evil*.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:31, English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>14</sup> The significance of this tree, whether metaphorical or literal, deserves its own essay. It has been argued by theologians as early as Origen that evil existed before the creation and made its way into God's good creation via demonic agents. Regardless of when evil first came about, the fact remains that God's creation was good, and the first instance of evil *inside* God's creation happened through the sin of Adam and Eve.

<sup>15</sup> Romans 8:20, ESV.

<sup>16</sup> Origen. "On First Principles II, 9, 1-6," in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, ed. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 97.

use their free will to preserve the good. Furthermore, by describing evil as the withdrawal from the good, Origen refuses to grant evil its own ontological status. To do so would require evil either to be a creation of God or some mysterious entity that coexisted eternally with God.

Gregory of Nyssa picks up Origen's argument and takes it farther.<sup>17</sup> Gregory claims that humans were created to share in God's goodness. Thus, it was necessary for God to bestow on humans God's own image (Genesis 1:27). Part of this image included free will, which would allow humans to attain higher forms of excellence as they chose the good. Yet, this freedom entailed the possibility of withdrawing from the good. In Plantinga fashion, Gregory concludes that when Adam and Eve withdrew from God's good plan and ate from the forbidden tree, evil was born. Gregory states: "The origin of evil can only be understood as the absence of virtue."<sup>18</sup> So in Brian's case, a common interpretation of the Biblical narrative, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Alvin Plantinga all agree the origin of this evil is found in the free will of the drunk driver.

Now that a Christian explanation for the origin of moral evil in Brian's case has been forwarded, it must be restated that this explanation is different than a solution. To clarify this point, an analogy may be helpful: the United States is currently in the midst of an economic crisis. Explaining the reasons behind why the crisis has developed the way that it has may be helpful as far as mental understanding is concerned, but it is a far cry from a solution to the turmoil. Though understanding the reasons for the crisis may help in discovering the solution, the solution itself must trace out the path toward recovery *and* result in recovery. Similarly, although explaining the origins of evil may help humans understand their predicament, a real solution will bring resolution to the problem of evil by tracing out how evil can be overcome and

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<sup>17</sup> Gregory's entire argument can be found in "Catechetical Oration 5-8," in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, ed. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 101-12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

by guaranteeing its eradication. Fortunately, the Christian solution to the problem of evil does precisely that. Christian eschatology guarantees evil's defeat, the beginning and end of which is Jesus Christ. The remainder of this essay will explore how this works.

## Jesus Christ: The Beginning of God's Answer to Evil

Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, lies at the center of the Christian message. Christians declare that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”<sup>19</sup> This apostle Paul understood that this doctrine is profound and difficult to understand, claiming that it is “a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles,”<sup>20</sup> for the crucified Christ means that the eternal Word, God incarnate, “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.”<sup>21</sup> The followers of Christ have been trying to make sense of these events ever since.

Athanasius, the great church father who defended what would become known as the orthodox doctrines of Jesus, invested his life in explaining what the Bible means when it says that “the Word became flesh.” It may be helpful to quote him at length in order to establish the Church's position on the Incarnation of Christ that has dominated for almost two centuries:

*[The Word of God] saw how the surpassing wickedness of men [sic] was mounting up against them; [the Word] saw also their universal liability to death. All this He saw and, pitying our race, moved with compassion for our limitation, unable to endure that death should have the mastery ... He took to Himself a body, a human body even as our own ... Thus taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death in place of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die, and the law of death thereby be abolished.*<sup>22</sup>

In this text, Athanasius is mainly concerned with establishing the reasons for the Incarnation, as well as a Christology that asserts not only the eternal, divine nature of Christ, but also Christ's

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<sup>19</sup> John 1:14, ESV.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23, ESV.

<sup>21</sup> Apostles' Creed.

<sup>22</sup> St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: the Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 1998), 34.

true humanity.<sup>23</sup> In other words, Athanasius wants to show that Jesus Christ was truly God and truly human. This idea has great consequence for the problem of moral evil. In the above quote, the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, saw the catastrophic effects of human wickedness – death and corruption – and out of compassion decided to intervene. Taking a human body, with all of its liability to corruption, the Word died in the place of all, defeating death and allowing humankind to share in His victory.

Here we see the strange message of the Gospel: the eternally begotten Son of God, in the kenotic event of the Incarnation, became one of us. Not only that, He became susceptible to the corruption of being human. Indeed, the Word became the victim of moral evil as He walked the face of the earth. He confronted the moral hypocrisy of the Pharisees, challenged sinners to repent, abstained from moral evil Himself, and was eventually murdered because of the evil intentions of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders. Yet in Jesus' suffering, God was at work, bringing about the redemption of humanity from sin, death, and evil.

But what does this mean for us today? Specifically, how do the Incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ help solve the problem of moral evil in Brian's case? This question may be answered in several different ways. First of all, the life and death of Jesus Christ provides spiritual comfort to families like Brian's who wonder if God still loves them and cares for them. The simple fact that God, through Jesus, entered the human situation and battled evil in Jesus' own human flesh provides Christians with the enormous comfort that God loves them. Not only can God empathize with them, but God can *sympathize* with them in suffering.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere Athanasius states "he who is eternally God ... had subsequently also become man for our sake." *Against the Arians III*, 29-34 in *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, ed. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 54.

<sup>24</sup> Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness" (ESV).

Secondly, Christ's work brings spiritual comfort to the drunk driver, should the driver choose to seek it. Moral evil affects not only the victims, but the perpetrators as well. Through Christ's work on the cross, God was working to be reconciled to the driver: "through Christ, God reconciled us to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:18, ESV). Rather than being tortured by a guilty conscience for the rest of this person's life, God desires that the driver who took Brian's life would turn to God and receive the reconciliation that God offers. Having been reconciled to God through Christ, the driver would be free to seek reconciliation with Brian's family. After all, God has given all those to whom God has been reconciled the "ministry of reconciliation."

Third, Christ's work on the cross gives Brian's family grounds for forgiveness. Because God, in Christ, has already performed the work of reconciliation, atoned for the sins of the world (Brian's sins, the family's sins, and the driver's sins included), and will one day judge all according to their deeds (Romans 2), the family may rest in the knowledge that God has already dealt with the driver's evil and will continue to do so. Forgiveness is a powerful force that ends cycles of moral evil, and Jesus Christ is the example of that truth. While being crucified, Jesus cried "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34, ESV). Though it is difficult, we are now free to do the same.

Fourth, Christ's suffering provides an example of how Christians should endure suffering. Peter, the apostle who originally fled the suffering that threatened him during Christ's trial and crucifixion, was eventually crucified upside-down as he embraced God's call for him to suffer. One of the most powerful letters in the New Testament on suffering is attributed to him. 1 Peter 2:21 says that believers have been called to suffering, "because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."<sup>25</sup> Following in His steps

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<sup>25</sup> All references from 1 Peter are from the English Standard Version.

means believers should live “no longer for human passions but for the will of God.”<sup>26</sup> Just as Christ entrusted Himself to God, believers should “entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, Christ’s example of suffering shows us that the proper response to the suffering caused by evil is not to doubt God, but to trust God while continuing to do good. Admittedly, this task will not be easy. Thus, it will be helpful to move to the next point.

The final point is that Christ’s work on the cross gives us hope that God can redeem or bring meaning to moral evil. This point has two parts. The first is an argument based on induction. It proceeds thus: if God is able to bring the greatest good known to humankind through the greatest evil ever committed, namely, the murder of God, then God should be able to use Brian’s death for some greater good as well. Again, it is helpful to fall back upon the theology of Romans 8:28: God promises to work all things for good for those who love God. Moreover, the Bible is full of examples of men and women who suffered great loss, wherein God used their loss to bring about something good. One thinks of the plight of Joseph in Egypt, the testing of Job, and the death of David and Bathsheba’s child after their infidelity, to name a few. In each of these examples, God used moral evil for good. Harkening back to my argument in the first section, the aim here is not to provide a justification (theodicy) for God’s actions in every situation of evil, including the case of Brian. Rather, the point is to give believers hope that God *can* bring about good from seemingly pointless evil. Indeed, God has promised to do so. But in what should believers ground their hope? After all, death is still present, moral evil is still rampant, and it is hard to believe that Christ’s death has done anything to change these facts. This leads us to the second part of this point, and the third section of this essay: eschatology.

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Peter 4:2, ESV.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Peter 4:19, ESV.

## The Eschaton: The Culmination of God's Answer to Evil

In the wake of Brian's death, his family and friends continue to struggle to make sense of their tragic loss. Christianity affirms that death is an enemy,<sup>28</sup> and it often seems like this enemy is winning. Though it may seem helpful in theory to comfort the family with the knowledge that God is working their tragedy towards some good end, this comfort seems trite to those in the midst of pain. The fact of the matter is that as humans who lack the big picture, it is often impossible to understand what good God could be working from such a seemingly pointless tragedy. The victory of moral evil seems permanent as more time passes without positive results. Furthermore, even if the family was able to point to some good that resulted from Brian's death, it is not certain that they would concede that Brian's death was worth it.

In light of these considerations, the need for a strong eschatology becomes vital to sustain hope that God can bring meaning to moral evil. Fortunately, a strong eschatology is precisely what Christianity provides. The Biblical claim for the end times is huge: "[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'"<sup>29</sup> God has promised that weeping, death, mourning, and pain will have no share in the end times. In the same way that God raised Jesus from the dead, God has promised to raise Brian.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, though Brian's family and friends can only see what God is doing now in a small part, as though they are looking through a dirty glass, they will one day fully know the perfecting work of God.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the eschatological claims of these verses affirm that one day Brian and his family will fully

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<sup>28</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26.

<sup>29</sup> Revelation 21:4-5, ESV.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12.

understand the meaning behind his death. So even though the drunk driver may have been pursuing his or her own evil devices, Brian's family will know that God meant it for good.<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of the solutions offered so far, there may still be some who are holding out for some type of courtroom justice in Brian's case. Not surprisingly, Christian eschatology offers exactly that. For those evildoers who refuse the justice offered in the death and resurrection of Christ, the Bible promises that there will be tribulation and distress.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Jesus Himself promised that those who do good will be resurrected to life, and those who do evil will be resurrected to judgment.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of whether or not there will in fact be salvation for all, the Bible paints a grim picture of what it means to be judged for doing evil.<sup>35</sup> However, a word of warning is needed here: Jesus also promises that God will judge people with the same measure that they judge others.<sup>36</sup> So let us leave the task of judging to God and hope in the promise that in the end, nothing will be able to condemn us or separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>37</sup> Our sovereign God has promised to bring it to pass, so let the Bride of Christ say "come."

## God's Sovereignty is the Key to Actualizing Christianity's Eschatology

Now that an answer to the logical problem of evil has been given and a case for the solution to the evidential problem of evil has been presented, namely, Jesus Christ and eschatology, it will be important to describe which Christian eschatology is being engaged as a solution to the

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<sup>32</sup> This is a reference to Joseph's interpretation of the evil intentions of his brothers found in Genesis 50:20.

<sup>33</sup> Romans 2:9.

<sup>34</sup> John 5:29.

<sup>35</sup> Some poignant examples are Matthew 25 and Revelation 21:8-27.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 7:2.

<sup>37</sup> Romans 8:34-39.

problem. To do so, I will examine traditional approaches to eschatology in contrast with what has been described as “Open Theism.”

Traditionally, Christians have asserted that God has sovereignly ordained the future in such a way that God knows the future with certainty. The means by which God knows the future have been heavily debated, especially between Calvinists and classical Arminians, but there has usually been a consensus among orthodox<sup>38</sup> Christians that the eschatological claims of the Bible and the truthfulness of its prophecies are not in doubt. This consensus has usually been achievable because both sides have claimed that God *knows for certain* that these claims will come to pass. So while the means of God’s knowledge have been debated – for instance, whether God is outside of time or knows the future due to God’s own predestination – God’s knowledge was not itself called into question.

Yet, a new trend is rising among orthodox Christians, called Open Theism, which claims that God does not know the future for certain (see footnote 4). To be sure, Open Theists are usually orthodox in that they do not question the eschatological claims of Scripture. Most of those Christian theologians advocating an Open Theist view still affirm the orthodox eschatology that I have laid out above. Furthermore, Open Theists typically do not question God’s sovereignty or the eschatological claims of Scripture; instead, they believe that God has freely chosen to restrain God’s foreknowledge in the kenotic event of creation.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Open Theists believe their theology lends itself to a strong theodicy because, on their view, God lacks definitive foreknowledge of moral evils and cannot be held liable for those evils. In Brian’s

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<sup>38</sup> I realize that this is a highly polemicized word that has been used to demonize opponents of certain positions. In this context, I use it only as a means of referring to those Christians who believe in some actualization of the eschatological claims of Scripture.

<sup>39</sup> See Pinnock, “Constrained by Love,” 151-2. For creation as kenosis, see Jordan Carson, “The Suffering God and Cross in Open Theism: Theodicy or Atonement?” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 323-337. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed November 9, 2011).

case, they would have no problem answering the charge that God was unfair to lead Brian back home to be hit by a drunk driver. Based on the knowledge that God had at the time, it may have seemed like it would be a good idea. Indeed, on an Open Theist scheme, it seems much easier to justify God for particular evils like Brian's death.<sup>40</sup> Yet, my contention is that Open Theism gives up too much. In its attempt to explain the existence of evil in the world today, Open Theism undermines Christian eschatology in principle by making the future uncertain and unknowable.

First, God's promise to work things together for good is undermined by the fact that God cannot work against the free will of God's creatures. In Brian's case, it is conceivable that free agents will stifle the present work of God, making it impossible to bring good out of the situation. Indeed, on an Open Theist scheme, all moral evil could potentially be gratuitous and devoid of meaning. Second, it is unclear how Open Theism can guarantee that in the eschaton evil will have no place among the people of God. Instead, if God does not know how humans will make their choices in the future, it would seem possible that in the eschaton believers may choose to reject God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Conceivably, we can in principle, and we may do so in actuality. Third, it is uncertain that God will gain ultimate victory over the forces of evil. Unless God chooses to unilaterally override the free choices of humans in the future, it is possible that, among other things, every believer may decide to abandon faith in God and wage war against God for the rest of time. Thus, if my arguments for the solution to the problem of moral evil are taken to be correct, in principle they will be at odds with an Open Theist perspective on eschatology. Indeed, this would seem to imply that one

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<sup>40</sup> I am not convinced that this is indeed the case. For an article critiquing Open Theist theodicies, see Paul Helseth, "On Divine Ambivalence: Open Theism and the Problem of Particular Evils." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 3 (September 1, 2001): 493-511. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 14, 2011).

cannot logically hold the solution that I have posited above, namely, an actualized eschatology, and Open Theism. To hold both, one would need to modify some important eschatological claims.

## Conclusion

All things considered, the pain and feelings of loss resulting from Brian's death remain. No Christian theodicy or eschatology can change the emptiness that comes from the loss of a loved one. Yet, Christianity claims to offer a profound solution to the problem of moral evil. Though philosophical arguments over the origin of evil can be fruitful and sometimes necessary to maintain logical credibility, these arguments ultimately fail to offer a solution to the problem of evil because they do not explain how God is working to overcome evil. Thus, after establishing Christianity's logical consistency in the face of moral evil, I moved to show the ways in which God *has* acted, *is* acting, and *will* act to overcome evil. First, Christ's work in the incarnation illustrates how God has acted to gain victory over evil. Second, Christ's work continues to fight against evil in the lives of believers today by encouraging them to be agents of moral change in the world and by giving them comfort and hope. Third, this hope is grounded in God's promises for the end of time, when the pain and suffering caused by Brian's death will be swallowed up in the victorious love of God. Believers can hope in this future because God has sovereignly determined that it will be so; thus, an open theist solution for evil will not be eschatologically satisfying. This is the Christian response, rooted in eschatology, to moral evil.

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