

‘REJOICE ALWAYS.’ HOW EVERYDAY JOY RESPONDS TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL¹

• Adrian J. Walker •

“Everyday joy is at once a claim that
the good is ontologically primary
with respect to evil and the deed
that backs the claim up.”

Introduction: the primacy of joy

Evil is a curiously Janus-like phenomenon. On the one hand, it pervasively colors historical existence, from which it can be no more removed by human effort than death (the two phenomena are, in fact, intimately connected). Because of this ubiquity, evil insinuates itself even into the fabric of the everyday and so becomes “banal,” to use Hannah Arendt’s famous phrase. On the other hand, no matter how common evil is in fact, no matter how widely diffused in “structures of sin” that shape whole cultures and in which we are all more or less complicit, evil never quite manages to complete its colonization of the normal, and its “banality” always betrays a conscience that has either never awakened or has lulled itself to sleep. No matter how seemingly inevitable evil is, then, it never altogether loses its power to shock, but always remains a *scandal*.

It is a good thing that evil scandalizes us. Our sense of outrage testifies that we have not yet lost the ability to recognize it

¹For my mother.

for what it is. If evil is evil, in fact, it is because it is not normal, but abnormal, monstrous, and prodigious, no matter how prevalent it may be *de facto*. What is normal is not evil, but the good. In saying this, we formulate the experiential root of the classical Christian doctrine that evil is not equi-primordial with the good, but rides parasitically on it—is a “privation of a due good,” in the scholastic language of Thomas Aquinas. At stake in Thomas’ admittedly dry definition of evil is nothing less than the affirmation that reality is basically good, and that it is good to exist in this world, despite the presence of evil in it. It is this affirmation that I would like to develop and defend in what follows.

The *telos* of my reflection in this essay is the theme of *joy*, which is what the affirmation of being’s goodness becomes in the Christian heart. The Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonians to “rejoice always” [*pantote chairete*] (1 Thess 5:16), thereby declaring joy the fundamental trait of the Christian *ethos*. If we follow Paul’s injunction, then, our last word as Christians can never be scandal over evil, however intensely we may and should feel that scandal, but, as Nietzsche liked to say, “Yes and Amen”: joy. John Henry Newman (who felt as keenly as anyone the scandal of evil) admirably expresses this Christian primacy of joy in the following passage:

Gloom is no Christian temper; that repentance is not real which has not love in it; that self-chastisement is not acceptable which is not sweetened by faith and cheerfulness. We must live in sunshine, even when we sorrow; we must live in God’s presence, we must not shut ourselves up in our own hearts, even when we are reckoning up our past sins. . . . We must look abroad into this fair world, which God made “very good,” while we mourn over the evil which Adam brought into it. We must hold communion with what we see there while we seek Him who is invisible; we must admire it while we abstain from it; acknowledge God’s love while we deprecate his wrath; confess that, many as are our sins, His grace is greater. Our sins are more in number than the hairs of our head; yet even the hairs of our head are all numbered by Him. He counts our sins, and, as He counts, so can He forgive; for that reckoning, great though it be, comes to an end; but His mercies fail not, and His Son’s merits are infinite.²

²Erich Przywara, *The Heart of Newman. A Synthesis Arranged by Erich Przywara, S.J.* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 317f.

Newman's eloquent insistence on the primacy of joy in the Christian outlook brings us directly to the question whose resolution is the aim of what follows: does the Christian who always and first rejoices thereby evade the seriousness of the problem of evil? I respond in the negative, and I propose to spend the rest of the essay explaining why. I want to make it clear from the outset, though, that I am not going to try to apologize for joy. Joy, like the ontological goodness of which it is the celebratory affirmation, needs no justification other than itself. It would therefore be perverse to rebut the charge that joy is an evasion of the problem of evil by lading it with a merely human seriousness. I do not mean, of course, that evil is *not* a serious matter, but rather just the opposite: the problem of evil is too serious for us human beings to handle alone, partly because we ourselves are too involved in evil to be truly objective about it lacking divine help and illumination. Without a joy born of the confidence that God's mercy infinitely outweighs evil, we inevitably replace an objective concern for divine justice with the partisanship of human self-righteousness, God's wrath with man's rage, the loving ferocity of the saint with the humorless ranting of the self-professed "radical." Without joy, protest becomes an end in itself and turns to violence, becoming a mirror image of the evil, real or imagined, that called it forth—as Islamist terror reminds us in our own day. That having been said, I hope to make it clear in the appropriate places that joyful trust in God's victory over evil is not a self-centered quietism, but precisely a way of participating in that victory, which God has always already won in Christ, even as he leaves us "room" to "complete what is lacking to the sufferings of Christ" (Col 1:24). Christian joy is not just a state of mind, but a deed, a deed that is first God's and only then ours by participation.

In arguing that Christian joy is not an evasion of the problem of evil, but an answer to it, I will attempt to show that joy, precisely as a participation in God's saving action, makes out of evil whatever sense there is to be made out of it. My task in what follows, then, is not simply "pious," but also "theological." Or rather, it is to develop a theological account of evil that stresses the close interweaving of logic—of making sense out of evil as an intellectual problem—and of life—of joyful participation in God's victory over evil. In order to make clear the pertinence of such a "dramatic logic" to the question of evil, however, I will first briefly outline, defend, and, in one crucial place, amplify Thomas Aquinas' account of evil as *privatio boni debiti* ("privation of a due good"), which, I will argue, offers both a

key to understanding why evil is a scandal and a necessary, though not sufficient, element for responding to the question that this scandal raises. Having taken this preliminary step, I will then make the case (in section II) that an explanation of evil that truly explains it without explaining it away requires a “dramatic logic of Providence,” whose argument is God’s own theo-dramatic engagement with the world culminating in Christ. The third section of the essay (III) then goes on to explain how Christ himself is God’s own “theodicy” in the flesh. Finally, section four (IV) will return thematically to joy, which springs up from participation in Christ’s singular theo-dramatic action. Joy, I will argue, is not a euphoric “high,” but the confidence, restored to us by Christ’s Redemption, that life is liveable, and is worth living, also and especially in the normality of the everyday. This argument, I hope, will help to unmask the dangerous temptation lurking in feelings of guilt over the relative normality of our lives as compared with others’—and, at the same time, to show the realism of joy as a response to the problem of evil. Joy, lived out in the banality of the everyday, is not just a condition of the possibility of action on behalf of the afflicted. It is itself a form of effective, universal responsibility for them in God’s theo-dramatic economy.

I. The scandal of evil

At the heart of the problem of evil is the question “why is there evil?” This question is not a wounded animal’s inarticulate cry, but a rational being’s request for understanding. A basic presupposition of my argument in what follows is that it is possible to fulfill this request—to a certain extent and in a specific way, which remain to be explained, and which, I will argue, do not commit the error of attempting to fit evil tidily into some supposedly rational economy. Before tackling the question as to why there is evil, however, we need to be able to say something about what it is. If we consult our experience, we find two elements that, taken together, give us an intuitive picture of the “nature” of evil. On the one hand, experience testifies that the phenomenon of evil is not an illusion, but a reality that no human effort or technique can eradicate.³ On the

³In saying this, I am implicitly rejecting both a general faith in progress and the

other hand, experience shows that evil happens, not when something goes right, but when something goes wrong. Notice how this second intuition is implicitly teleological. It tacitly supposes, that is, that there is a way things should be, and that, in the normal case, they are that way. It is against this often unthematized teleological horizon that evil stands out, jarringly, as a regrettable, and even perverse, failure to fulfill an appointed *telos*.⁴ If there is an appropriate

specifically scientific form of that faith, whose ideal is an (asymptotic) elimination of suffering and death through technology. Technology, it should be noted, is not just an application of science, but is its guiding ideal: science was born in the modern West, not only from the desire to understand things for the sake of understanding, but also, and perhaps dominantly, from the desire to better the human condition through the control of natural forces. One of the costs of the pursuit of this scientific–technological dream has been a reduction of the mystery of evil. In order to lay open to human control in the way classical modern science imagines, the world has to be a machine. But, if it is a machine, then evil is either a cog set in place by the Designer (Leibniz) or the inevitable by-product of the friction of its blindly interacting parts (Darwin). But, in either case, evil is no longer truly evil—no longer a “mystery of iniquity” that originates in demonic refusal of God and then disrupts (without completely abolishing) the original harmony of the cosmos. Indeed, as C.S. Lewis suggests in *That Hideous Strength*, the scientific–technological approach to evil, to the extent that it attempts to eradicate suffering without taking account of the *mysterium iniquitatis*, actually feeds into the demonic “No” to God that is the problem in the first place. None of this should be taken as an argument against the attempt to alleviate suffering, but is meant only to underscore that the conventional distinction between technique (which is supposedly neutral) and use (which is putatively good or bad depending only on the user’s intentions) not only does not stand up to analysis, but is itself the expression of a worldview that sees man as the unique source of moral value in an essentially amoral, machine-like universe (even though early proponents of this worldview such as Leibniz tried to restrain its radical implications by retaining God as a Benevolent Designer of the universal mechanism). Despite the intentions of the individuals who (often unconsciously) hold it, this worldview objectively plays into the demonic refusal of God’s Lordship over the cosmos that is the source of evil and suffering in the first place.

⁴A *telos* need not be thought of as a definite goal lying outside the teleologically-directed entity itself. We do not adequately account for the teleology of a horse, for instance, when we observe that the horse is useful for the farmer or the foxhunter. The horse’s immanent *telos* does fit it to serve the purposes of human beings, but it is by no means exhausted by this (for us) happy circumstance. Rather than an extrinsic goal-directedness, *telos* is primarily the condition in which a being is “at its best.” That condition, moreover, is not just a state, but, concurrently, an activity, albeit one of a very special kind: not an outward-directed productivity, but a “homeostatic” self-maintenance in constant interchange with the world. The reason why this “homeostasis” is called a *telos*, an *end*, is that it is a definitive

perfection that something should have, experience suggests, evil is a *de-fection* that signifies precisely the non-realization of that very perfection. Thus, if the first intuition grasps evil as a reality ineliminable by unaided human effort, the second qualifies the first by distinguishing evil from every other reality with which we are familiar: evil is not an achievement that enriches the patrimony of being, but an inexplicable, even perverse, withdrawal of that very achievement.

Thomas Aquinas gives a technical formulation to this double experiential intuition about evil in his definition of evil as a "privation of a due good."⁵ Although Thomas is often unjustly faulted for dismissing evil as a harmless nothing, the truth is that he does not deny that there are evil people, things, and events, but rather attempts to capture, as precisely as possible, the *intrinsic, formal principle of their being evil*. Thomas' dry Aristotelian vocabulary conceals, not a denial of evil, but an effort to understand exactly why it is evil in the first place. To be sure, Thomas is interested in the formal principle of evil, and, to the extent that form bespeaks perfection, evil, as the contrary of perfection, cannot be a form, but must be a certain "absence" of form.⁶ This absence, however, is not a mere nothing, but a "privation,"⁷ a "negation in" an underlying

achievement, even though its definitiveness is displayed in the conditions of space and time, hence, as a suffering of the world that is simultaneously an active assimilation of it in the construction of a habitat. We can speak of a teleological norm governing this "home-building," not because the organism isn't "creative," but because its creativity is an ever-new self-maintenance "according to type" within changing circumstances.

⁵The following brief discussion of Aquinas' account of evil is not meant to be a scholarly disquisition, but to convey concisely what I take to be the essential point of that account as it bears on the task of the essay. I will be referring throughout this section only to Thomas' discussion in question 48 of the *prima pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* (=ST). I should also note that, while Thomas does not use the formula "privation of a due good" in this text, the formula captures precisely the nub of the understanding of evil he presents in it.

⁶"[W]e must say that the being [*esse*] and the perfection of every nature whatever has the character of goodness. Therefore, it cannot be the case that evil signifies some being or some form or nature. It follows, then, that the term evil signifies a certain absence of the good" (ST I, 48, 1).

⁷"[E]vil is distant from both being absolutely and non-being absolutely, because it has being [*est*], neither as a habit nor as a pure negation, but as a privation" (ST I, 48, 2, ad 1).

“subject.”⁸ It is, moreover, the privation of a good that “can be had by nature [*natum est haberi*] and ought to be had [*debet haberi*].”⁹ This “privation of a due good,” however, is not a static, neutral lack. It is an “*a bono deficere*”¹⁰: a quasi-active “defecting from the good,” a defective actuality, a failure to be. If we keep in mind that evil has to occur in a “subject,” then we must say that this “defecting” is a quasi-act of that subject, indeed, affects the subject’s act of be-ing, which now realizes the subject defectively on account of the “privation of the due good” it suffers. Far from trivializing evil as a harmless nothing, then, the *privatio boni* account identifies precisely its terrible reality: because evil is a privation having no reality of its own, the reality it does have can only be that of the actuality of the underlying “subject” itself—seen, not in its per-fection, but in a (quasi-active) de-fection that is nothing less than a “malflourishing” of its whole self in the concrete.¹¹ Evil, Thomas is telling us, is not a nothing, but a voracious ontological parasite that feeds off of the real in order to clothe its empty center with a shadowy, counterfeit substance with no originality of its own.

Thomas’ account of evil as “privation of the good” does three things that are crucial for our discussion:

(1) First, the Thomistic account simultaneously explains why evil is scandalous and assures us that, however clamorous it is, this

⁸*ST I*, 48, 3.

⁹*ST I*, 48, 5, ad 1.

¹⁰*ST I*, 48, 2 *et passim*.

¹¹This is not to say that evil totally corrupts in the sense of removing all the being and goodness in a thing. Thomas explicitly denies that it does (*ST I*, 48, 4). The point is simply that evil is the privation of a “crucial piece” that makes for the thing’s integrity or fulfillment. Absent that “piece,” the whole fails to live up to its idea, and so becomes bad as a whole, or, at least, significantly impaired. Another way of putting this is to say that a thing’s act of existence (*esse*), which posits in being all that is in the thing, also “posits” the privation of the due good *as* a privation—which thus affects everything else in the thing “indirectly” via the *actus essendi*. On the—or a broadly—Thomistic view, then, evil affects every aspect of a thing *in concreto*, even if it does not make every aspect of a thing bad *in abstracto*. Such a view allows us to do justice to the insight contained in the Reformed doctrine of “total depravity,” which insists that there is no part of the fallen creature untouched by sin, while simultaneously retaining the “Catholic” affirmation that, buried under every evil is a good waiting to be redeemed—so that the Redemption is not simply a second creation out of nothing, but also a restoration of the first creation *as creation*.

scandal can never obliterate the good. On the one hand, if evil is a privation of the good, we should expect it to be more obtrusive—to be more shockingly scandalous—than the good. Being normal, in fact, the good has “nothing to prove,” and so imposes its presence with a kind of quiet, solid reliability, whereas evil, a usurper with “everything to prove,” rebounds off the serene normality of the good with a loud, violent explosiveness.¹² On the other hand, because evil’s obtrusiveness results from a violent contrast with the “agathological” norm, it does not call the primacy of the good into question, but rather offers an indirect, negative confirmation of it. Indeed, we have to presuppose the absolute primacy of the good precisely in order to see evil as evil, as something intrinsically and absolutely bad—rather than as something merely unpleasant which one could, with time, get used to—and so to give full weight to our sense of scandal over it.

(2) Second, by refusing to give up either the ontological primacy of the good or the factual occurrence of evil, the Thomistic *privatio boni* doctrine enables us to move from the question of what evil is to the question of why it is, which arises precisely because the good has an absolute ontological primacy over evil—and yet “allows” evil to occur alongside it or, indeed, within it (recall that evil is a “negation *in* a subject,” whose goodness is affected “all over” by this negation, but not entirely removed by it). The Thomistic account of evil helps us see that, if there is a why-question about the existence of evil—if there is a problem of evil—it is not because the existence of evil disconfirms the primacy of the good (if it did, the problem of evil would disappear), but rather because it raises a question about the good’s puzzling way of asserting its

¹²The evening news lives off of this obtrusiveness of evil: there is bad news to be told only because bad news can be easily pinpointed, and it can be easily pinpointed only because it stands out against a limitless background of normality. Good news is so woven into the fabric of everyday life that it can seem to be no news at all, and so can be taken for granted. It is important to see that part of the goodness of the good consists in its “wanting” to veil itself in the ordinariness of the everyday. It is precisely by making itself available as an anonymous, reliable presence for others that it completes the self-communication in which it is fulfilled as goodness. The good, in fact, is not just teleological perfection, but, simultaneously, the communication of that perfection. Self-maintenance and self-diffusion are two sides of the same coin for finite entities whose being is a being within a communal web of “causality” understood as generous communication in giving and receiving.

primacy by withdrawing into the background before the obtrusive display of evil. The *privatio boni* doctrine helps us see, in a word, that the problem of evil is fundamentally a question about the justice of God's "permission" of evil in a world that he creates and providentially governs: if God is "in charge" of the world, is it not mysterious that he allows evil to occur in it? Since this question becomes particularly acute in the face of the phenomenon of innocent suffering, I will be making the latter central to my reflections throughout the rest of the essay.

(3) The Thomistic definition of evil as a privation of the good not only enables us to pose the problem of evil, but it also defines the parameters within which we have to answer it. It does this by requiring us to take seriously the ontological depth of evil—evil is wounded be-ing, which affects everything co-positing in existence by that be-ing—without for all that subscribing to any form of Manichean dualism. Of course, the mere statement of these parameters does not in and of itself answer the question as to why there is evil. Nevertheless, it does delineate, in a formal way, the outlines of the answer. While conceiving evil as an ontological wound that touches the act of being, Thomas nonetheless removes it from the constitution of nature—and, in so doing, implicitly "historicizes" it in the direction of an intra-cosmic Fall of men and of angels.¹³ He does this, for example, when, in *Summa Theologiae* I, 48, 6, he explains that *culpa*, sin or "moral evil," is the prime instance of evil ("guilt [*culpa*] is a greater evil than punishment"¹⁴) and in I,

¹³In speaking of a historical Fall, I do not mean to suggest, of course, that the Fall is simply another event within *our* history, which is already marked by evil. Nevertheless, it does occur within a larger history of which the former is a sub-set. With Augustine, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus (among others), we can speak of different *states* of historical existence corresponding to the great articulations of the "economy" of salvation. These states can be in some respects discontinuous. For example, it is impossible to reconstruct what Paradise was like from the fragmentary hints left after the Fall. And yet, for all of their discontinuity, the *status* are linked together in a single history by God. History has a unity, not of man's making, but of God's. This is why we can simultaneously speak of a Providential plan for the world while vigorously rejecting any form of faith in "progress" or, indeed, any presumption that we can read God's purposes immediately and simplistically off of human history.

¹⁴*STI*, 48, 6.

48, 5 that "physical evil," strictly speaking, is a *poena* following upon the (historically committed) *culpa* of rational creatures.¹⁵

By answering the question about why evil exists in terms of an intra-cosmic, historical Fall, we can do two crucial things at once: (1) to take seriously, perhaps more seriously than even Thomas himself does, the corruption, concupiscence, and conflict that sin has introduced into concrete spatio-temporal existence, especially for biological creatures, making it *in concreto* a "being towards death," and so setting the proximate conditions for innocent suffering¹⁶; (2)

¹⁵In this latter text, Thomas distinguishes two levels on which a "defection" from the good may happen: the level of "first act," in which a thing's nature is impaired, and the level of "second act," in which a thing's "due operation" is removed, either because it fails to occur, or because it does not occur in the right way. "[E]vil . . . is a privation of the good, which consists principally and *per se* in act. But act is twofold: there is a first act and a second act. Now, the first act is the form and the integrity of a thing, whereas the second act is an operation. Evil can thus happen in two ways. In one way, by the subtraction of a form, or of some part, that is required for the integrity of a thing, in the way that being blind, or lacking a member, is an evil. In a second way, by the subtraction of a due operation, either because it does not happen at all, or because it does not have the due measure and order" (*ST I*, 48, 5). Both kinds of *deficere a bono* that Thomas mentions affect an entity's very being, seen either from the point of view of its beginning—its initial natural patrimony—or from the point of view of its end—its naturally appointed flourishing. Taken together, then, the two kinds of *deficere a bono* correspond roughly to so-called "physical evil." In rational beings, however, the second kind of defection, defective operation, can also take the form of conscious failure to act as one should, in which case it becomes what Thomas calls *culpa*, or what we would call "moral evil" (see *ibid.*). In addition to committing moral evil, rational beings of course continue to suffer "physical evil," both at the level of nature and of operation. At the same time, rational beings experience this double "physical evil" as what Aquinas calls *poena*, "punishment"—precisely for their *culpa*. In distinguishing *poena* and *culpa*, while making the latter follow on the former, Thomas implicitly "historicizes" evil in the sense I have stipulated. Physical evil, *poena*, is something that need not have been experienced—by rational beings.

¹⁶In reserving *poena* (but not all "physical evil") to rational creatures (see footnote 15), Thomas seems to suggest that the "physical evil" afflicting sub-rational creatures, unlike the *poena* inflicted on rational creatures (insofar as it is *poena*), is in tune with the natural order, whose overall balance requires a certain mutual destruction: "[M]any good things would be removed if God did not permit any evils to occur. For fire would not be generated unless air were corrupted, nor would the life of the lion be conserved unless the donkey were killed, or, indeed, would a person who punishes justly or suffers patiently be praised if there were no iniquity" (*ST I*, 48, 2, ad 3). Has Thomas taken seriously enough in this passage the possibility that sin has colored or disrupted cosmic order—has he perhaps not

to hold fast to these realities' historical and contingent character and just so far disentangle them from the original form of nature as God created it. This two-fold *desideratum* requires, in turn, taking account of the Redemption, which vindicates the goodness of creation in the only way that responds adequately to evil as a historical contingency—not by explaining it discursively, but by actively removing it, *deed for deed*. This invocation of the Redemption need not lead us to undervalue the *privatio boni* doctrine, or its “Aristotelian” emphasis on the abiding teleological ordering of the universe. Indeed, this emphasis remains indispensable, precisely because it enables us to think of the possibility of a Redemption that does not abolish or replace created nature, but preserves and restores it (in elevating it infinitely beyond itself). In the end, however, this “Aristotelian” moment—and, indeed, the *privatio boni* doctrine as a whole—depends, in its turn, on the Redemption, which definitively vindicates the ontological primacy of the good in the face of the historical reality of sin. It is the Redemption that once and for all disentangles evil from (historically fallen) nature, and so fully reveals nature's original form *as if for the first time* (while, of course, confirm-

conceded too much to Aristotle, for whom a cosmic disruption brought about by sin is not even a question? This is a complicated question. On the one hand, Thomas is surely right that finite, physical entities must in some sense thrive on mutual destruction, lest the “ecological” balance of the whole be disrupted (which is not to say, of course, that this balance depends solely on mutual destruction, without any non-destructive “symbiosis”). On the other hand, the pervasiveness of violence in the physical world, especially among living beings, is extremely puzzling, to say the least. Perhaps we can suggest the following solution: God sews an element of mutual destruction into the physical cosmos, especially into the animal realm, in prevision of the Fall—even as this element is not simply an entailment of sin, but brings to expression, in a historically conditioned way, a positive, ontological structure of finite being that we can call the latter's “kenotic moment.” Finite beings are partly withdrawn from their own control, and so exposed to the world around them. This exposure is not in and of itself bad, however, but expresses the goodness of finite being as an order of gift reflecting, distantly, God's own intra-Trinitarian life of gift. If it is asked how sin can have any influence over the physical cosmos, we can answer by pointing (1) to the position of man in the universe as “microcosm and mediator” (to cite the title of Lars Thunberg's study of Maximus the Confessor (Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator. The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd ed. [Chicago/La Salle, Open Court Press, 1995]) and (2) the sin of the angels, who, being entrusted with the maintenance of the physical cosmos under God, can be expected to disrupt it significantly when and if they fall.

ing all that men have perceived of its *logos* "by the light of reason").¹⁷ Having seen this, we cross the threshold of a "dramatic logic of Providence," which, I will claim in the following section, is the most adequate framework for making what sense can be made of evil, especially the evil of innocent suffering.

II. Towards a dramatic logic of providence¹⁸

The present essay is partly a refutation of the classical atheistic argument that the fact of evil disconfirms the "hypothesis" of God's existence. One possible strategy for executing this refutation would be to show that the atheistic position saws off the branch on which it sits: by removing God, it also removes the world-transcendent Justice to which we must refer in order even to see evil as evil. Although this strategy certainly has its merits, I will be pursuing another one that I consider to be more fruitful. The alternative strategy I have in mind attempts to practice what Balthasar calls "*Unterwanderung*," a difficult-to-translate concept that

¹⁷Christ, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22 famously declares, reveals man (and, we could add, the cosmos) to himself. This does not mean, of course, that human (and cosmic) nature is valid only provisionally until the coming of Christ. If nature were not an irrevocable gift given once and for all by the Creator, the Son of God could not have become incarnate in it in the way that orthodox Christology claims he did. Nevertheless, this "once and for all" of the gift of nature is not exhausted "protologically," but includes nature's unique instantiation in Christ, because Christ fulfills it totally in its paradoxical structure as something that can be itself only in participating in a divine life that infinitely exceeds it. Although nature is not provisional, it is Christ who fully displays the form of its *arche* from within its completed *telos*. By the same token, we cannot discount the possibility of historical *conditionings* of nature that can be relativized by Revelation (partly also because God's grace has never left fallen nature to its own devices). This does not rule out, of course, the complementary possibility that man can discern much of nature that Christ's revelation will confirm—albeit in surprising ways that may involve significant reversal.

¹⁸The discussion in this and the following section draws liberally on Hans Urs von Balthasar's conception of God's engagement with the world as a "theo-drama" played out against the background of God's own Trinitarian life. I am also indebted to D.C. Schindler's *The Dramatic Structure of Truth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). I will, however, also refer in a couple of key places to Aquinas in order to underline Balthasar's fidelity to the authentic spirit of the great Tradition (without, of course, claiming that Balthasar is a "Thomist").

connotes a retrieval of the opponent's legitimate concern "from below"—on other, deeper premises that enable a richer development of the opponent's concern than he himself is capable of giving it, a development that convinces by its greater fruitfulness. This strategy of *Unterwanderung* recommends itself in the case of the atheistic *ex malo* argument for two reasons. First, believers themselves share something of the perplexity that motivates the atheistic position, without, of course, subscribing to its conclusion. Indeed, if the Psalms are any indication, God is not afraid of our bafflement, but positively *invites* us to bring it before him in prayer. Why, we can pray with the perplexed Psalmist, do the evil prosper and the good suffer affliction? At this point, the first reason for the fittingness of the *Unterwanderung* strategy in the present case converges with a second, deeper, and more decisive one. Not only does Christ himself "*unterwandern*" the atheistic position, crying out from the Cross "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" but, *at that very moment*, he enacts God's answer to the problem of evil, God's very own divine "theodicy." The Crucified is God's own theodicy in the flesh.¹⁹ For in the Crucifixion, Christ enters into man's alienation

¹⁹I am not claiming, of course, that Christ loses faith in his Father's existence. Christ on the Cross is not an atheist. What I am rather suggesting is that Christ on the Cross loses everything but "faith." His vision of the Father, which he enjoys unbrokenly throughout his life, takes the form during his "hour" of what we can only call, analogously, pure "faith" without light or consolation. This sheer "faith" is not atheism, but rather an overcoming of God-lessness—according to Paul the common condition of (gentile) sinners, who are *atheoi en tō kosmō* (Eph 2:12), "godless in the world"—from within. Chiara Lubich speaks boldly of Christ's losing God for God's sake on the Cross. The experience of saints who, like Thérèse of Lisieux or Mother Teresa, suffer long periods of inner darkness without felt consolation, is a distant participation in this christological event. Along with Mother Teresa and Thérèse, we can also cite the example of the great twentieth-century Orthodox saint, Silouan of Mount Athos (1866–1938), who reports the following conversation with Christ: "'Lord,' I said, 'Thou art merciful. My soul knoweth Thee. Tell me what I must do so that my soul may grow humble?' And the Lord answered me in my soul: 'Keep thy mind in hell, and despair not.' . . . Since then I have kept my mind in hell, and I burn in the somber fire, yearning after the Lord and seeking Him in tears and saying: 'Soon I shall die and take my abode in hell, and I shall burn alone in longing for the Lord and lament: 'Where is my Lord, whom my soul knoweth?'" (Archimandrite Sophrony, *Wisdom from Mount Athos. The Writings of Staretz Silouan 1866–1938* [Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974], 119). As this dialogue with Christ suggests, even in the saint's loss of felt consolation, an "objective joy" remains, just as Christ's *Gottverlassenheit* in Balthasar's theology is a *mode* of his vision of the Father and a *form* of his union with him. Indeed, if it were

from God, his godlessness, and overcomes it from within, thus giving us the key to understanding God's patience with the fallen creature.

In focusing on the Paschal Mystery as the response to the question of evil, I do not at all mean to replace the effort to make sense out of evil with a mere "story." Although God's response to the question of evil is a deed—the Paschal Mystery of the incarnate Son—this deed itself enacts a "dramatic logic" that, I argue, responds in the only way possible to the request for meaning that comes to expression in the question of evil. It may seem to be somewhat gratuitous to introduce the notion of drama here. In reality, the switch to the "dramatic register" is appropriate for our argument. As we saw in the previous section, the problem of evil—and its divine resolution—revolve around freedom, its fall, and its restoration by God. Evil, as we have seen, is introduced into the world through free, historical action, and it can be overcome only through a free, historical action that matches and exceeds it. As a *privatio boni*, in fact, evil is not only a contingency that first arises within history, it is one that has no sense in itself. Consequently, it can be given a meaning, if at all, only after it has contingently occurred—in another contingent act that both compensates for it and, at the same time, exceeds it with a greater good than the one it has frustrated or ruined. It is therefore not sufficient for us to talk about evil as a privation of the due good. It is necessary that the ontological primacy of the good implied in such talk be vindicated through free, historical action. Hence the appropriateness of a dramatic framing of theodicy—for drama is the supreme artistic representation of freedom. The task before us now is to explain (1) how God's response to evil can be thought of along the lines of a (theo)drama and, above all, (2) how this dramatic response involves, not just a deed, but a fusion of *logos* and action that authorizes us to speak of a "dramatic logic" displayed in God's providential dealings with the world and the evil occurring in it.

(1) Human narrative art strives to "imitate nature," not by aping it externally, but by communicating to the work a mysterious share in *real being*. The playwright or novelist obeys the old dictum that *ars est celare artem*, attempting to fashion a work that, to the

not, then the experience of abandonment would be a form of atheism, rather than its radical overcoming from within.

extent possible, is as real as if he had not fashioned it at all, but had spontaneously sprung into being on its own.²⁰ In this respect, the human narrative artist is what J.R.R. Tolkien calls a “sub-creator” under God.²¹ But—and this is the crucial point—the human storyteller can “sub-create” because the Creator himself is a story-teller, and the world and its history are his literary *magnum opus*. Just as successful dramatic art imitates nature, so, too, nature imitates, or rather, *is* a successful work of dramatic art—indeed, *the* Masterpiece in whose fashioning every human playwright or novelist participates by virtue of “sub-creation.”²²

But why, it may be asked, should God’s *ad extra* “economy” take the form of a *drama*? God is a liberal gift-giver. His first gift to the creature is the creature’s very being itself “*ex nihilo*.” It is precisely because God liberally gives real being that his creative work uniquely fulfills the artist’s intention to produce something that doesn’t “feel” artificial but natural. Now, one of the characteristics of the “natural,” as Aristotle saw, is that it has (or is) an inner depth out of which it emerges into the world with a certain spontaneity. Nature is a principle of what we might call “ontological freedom.” God, then, gives not only being, but ontological freedom with it.

²⁰“The work of art, in its irreplaceability, is not a mere bearer of meaning—as if the meaning could be placed on the shoulders of other bearers. The meaning of the work of art rests rather on the fact that it is there. In order to avoid any false connotation, then, we should replace the word ‘work’ with another one, namely, ‘formation’ [*Gebilde*]. . . . The ‘formation’ is above all nothing that someone has produced with some intention in mind. . . . One who has created a work of art stands before what his hands have formed like anyone else. There is a leap between planning and succeeding. It now ‘stands,’ and so it is ‘there’ once and for all. . . . There is a leap whereby the work of art distinguishes itself in its uniqueness and irreplaceability. It is what Walter Benjamin has called the aura of the work of art” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Die Aktualität des Schönen* [Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Junior, 1977], 44).

²¹See, in addition to scattered letters, J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories.”

²²Only, in the case of God, the reality of the story is not the participated reality proper to human art, but just *is* reality itself *tout court*. Over against Heidegger, Sartre, and others, we can say that creation out of nothing does not degrade the creature to the status of an artificial “product.” On the contrary, the “*ex nihilo*” clause guarantees that God’s creative act realizes in a peerless, once-only fashion every artist’s desire to “conceal his art,” by bringing into being—or letting be, as Heidegger says—a work that does not seem to be a work, that has the “feel” of springing into being spontaneously.

But, as I noted above, drama is the supreme artistic representation of freedom. If, then, God's liberal giving is artistic, and if it terminates in ontological freedom, then we can say that it produces, not just any kind of art work, but a dramatic one. But that is not all. To speak of freedom is to speak of history. And the history we know is one marked by the fall of freedom, angelic and human, through sin. At this point, God shows himself to be a liberal Giver in a new way that reveals the as yet unsuspected depths of his original gift. Not only does he give liberally, but, as part of that liberality, he remains faithful to his original gift of freedom throughout its entire history—even when that history is one of straying through sin. This divine fidelity means, on the one hand, that God does not leave fallen freedom alone, but, once it falls, immediately sets about retrieving it. Thus, our history is, centrally, a history of God's long reclamation of fallen freedom. On the other hand, however, the fidelity that God displays throughout the reclamation process includes a respect for freedom, which he always strives to turn back to himself *from within*. And that means: "dramatically," that is, in a personal engagement with created freedom as a free actor on the world-stage. Here we can think of the Old Testament, in which God enters world-history as an Agent who, while remaining sovereign, nonetheless exercises that sovereignty in such a way as to enable—and then take seriously—the free response of the creature. The Old Testament bears ample witness to the fact that this method of entry into history commits God to a long, patient struggle with fallen freedom—a struggle that is at least as dramatic (both for God and for the creature) as any action represented in the great Greek tragedies.

Hans Urs von Balthasar has developed this idea in the middle panel of his Trilogie, aptly titled *Theo-Drama*, in order to show that the Scriptural narrative is the "script" of God's world-drama in which we are all players. Balthasar echoes Tolkien's insight that the world is real in the way that a human play would be real if its author were divine, but he goes one step further: God himself becomes a character, indeed, the chief character in his own world-play. In the "fullness of time," the Son of God becomes man and, as man, offers *the* great human Yes to God's providential plan, a Yes that is itself the pivot of that entire plan, the decisive event that brings about the *dénouement* of the world-story's plot. World-history is a theo-drama, because God's method of exercising providential governance *over* it includes (even as it does not reduce to) his entrance *into* it as its

central *human* “player.” Balthasar also takes great pains to show that the primacy of God in the theo-drama does not suppress human freedom or make it superfluous, but, on the contrary, brings it fully into its own. I will return to this point briefly in sections III and IV.

(2) We have just seen that God’s theo-dramatic engagement with the world has a dramatic form. Can we say that this form is also a logic? Clearly, we must be able to answer affirmatively if we are going to maintain that God’s Providence embodies a “dramatic logic.” But how do we go about justifying our Yes to this question?

We have just seen that God’s creative act not only liberally gives being, but also gives what might be called an “ontological freedom.” This freedom, we can now add, is inwardly ordered to participation in the liberality of the Creator. The creature realizes this participation in a twofold manner. On the one hand, the creature is actively involved in the giving of being, and we can say that God’s creative deed is a liberal gift-giving precisely because it not only gives being, but also gives the giving of being, as it were putting his creative donation of being in his creatures’ hands. So much so that, as we will see below, God’s omnipotence includes a certain self-imposed “vulnerability” to creatures’ misuse of his gift. Hence the (self-chosen) dramatic “riskiness” of God’s creative action. On the other hand, while the creature truly participates in the giving of being through its significant action, this participation presupposes, and expresses, an ongoing receptivity vis-à-vis the Creator. Paradoxically, what is most the creature’s own—its significant being-giving action—is most God’s gift, and, indeed, belongs most properly to the creature because it is given most radically and completely by God. This is why God remains omnipotent in the midst of his “vulnerability” as a character in the world-drama—even as divine omnipotence has to be understood in dramatic terms.

Be that as it may, if we hold together these two aspects of the creature’s ontological freedom in a single thought, we get the following result: God’s giving of that freedom shows up *on the side of the creature* as a significant action that the creature performs to bring about a result at once corresponding to, and exceeding, that action. The inference I draw from this is that the structure of God’s creative act anticipates the form of the theo-drama, in which God gives and, at the same time, the creature participates in that giving through a fruitful obedience. This form culminates in Christ, who is God’s initiative and man’s response in one person, and, as such, is emi-

nently suited to en flesh God's answer to evil in that personal unity. But at this point our question returns: does this theo-dramatic structure or form contain a logic that can entitle us to speak of Providence's "dramatic logic"? The answer lies in the above-mentioned claim that corresponding to God's gift of freedom on the creature's side is significant action that brings about a result at once matching, and exceeding, that action. As we will see, this formula is not only the formula of creation, but also the formula of dramatic art—one more confirmation of the dramatic analogy I am proposing here. But, and this is the crucial point for answering our question, the quintessentially dramatic structure in which an outcome matches and exceeds action *is also a logical form of a distinctive kind*. Thus, if we can show that drama embodies a logic, and that God's Providence is a drama, we can speak of a "dramatic logic of Providence" —which, as we will see in section III of the essay, is the best framework for dealing with the problem of evil even as an intellectual problem. But first I propose five related points (2a, i-v) that highlight the logical form peculiar to dramatic narrative:

(a) (i) First, a good play (or novel) does not merely record its characters' actions, but, in so doing, sets them within a pattern, which gradually takes shape before our eyes as the plot unfolds. And yet, embedded within this narrative pattern, the characters' actions do not become mere illustrations of a general principle. Rather, they (or, more precisely, the characters through them) are revealed as *singulars*, that is, as unities possessing an ultimate, universal significance precisely in their particularity.²³

(ii) Second, because the singular is unique and universal at once, it cannot be accounted for in terms of anything more basic than itself. This does not mean that the singular is irrational, however. It just means that its way of "making sense" is to account for itself by displaying its inner intelligibility through its own concrete presence that interweaves particularity and universality. It bears stressing that "dramatic logic" does not therefore replace *logos* with the mere facticity of some naked deed. The point is rather that the *logos* inscribed in "dramatic logic" is inseparable from a facticity, even while giving such facticity the inner depth-dimension befitting the singular. Dramatic action is a self-display of *logos* in which the

²³I owe the term singularity to Kenneth Schmitz, who makes it the centerpiece of what he calls a "philosophy of the concrete."

event of the display itself is intrinsic to the latter's *logos*-character as such.

(iii) Third, the self-display of the singular in its intelligibility is not just a matter of mere action. It is a matter of action played out temporally against the background of a destiny exhibited in the *dénouement* of the plot. It is not just any isolated action taken by itself that displays a singular intelligibility, then, but only that action whose final consequences are unveiled in the *dénouement*.

(iv) In order for the drama's outcome to unveil the intelligibility of the singulars the drama represents, it must enable their actions to reveal a surplus of meaning that could not have come to light at any time in the play other than at the decisive *dénouement*. This revelation of excessive meaning moves simultaneously and inseparably in two countervailing directions. On the one hand, it shows that the surplus of meaning has always belonged to, has always been inherent in, the actions it crowns. Otherwise, the outcome would have no intelligible and organic connection to those actions, and would represent an arbitrary and unsatisfying *Deus ex machina*. On the other hand, the dramatic outcome cannot simply be a predictable result of the actions leading up to it. Otherwise, the outcome would be a foregone conclusion, and there would be no surplus of meaning for it to bring to light in a surprising, dramatically compelling way. The outcome of the play has to be a moment within the temporal structure of the play's action, and yet it cannot be just any moment, but must constitute a privileged *kairos*, a "fullness of the times," around which that whole structure of the play suddenly crystallizes. The outcome of the drama must rise up from the characters' significant actions with a necessity that becomes apparent as such only in simultaneously descending upon those actions with surprising freedom "from above" (from an "above" that is intrinsic to the narrative itself, even while discreetly pointing beyond it).

(v) It follows from (i-iv) this that dramatic narrative has a logical form, a form that befits the singular and crystallizes around a decisive moment that reveals the singular in its distinctive intelligibility. We can therefore speak of a "dramatic logic," which has three related characteristics that are important for our discussion. First, "dramatic logic" fuses action and *logos* into a unity. In a "dramatic logic," in other words, the argument is the action and the action is

the argument.²⁴ Second, “dramatic logic’s” fusion of reason and action implies that its cogency is not a matter of necessity alone. Just as the outcome of dramatic narrative is at once surprising and fitting, the “logic” that crystallizes around this outcome combines both necessity and freedom in a third “quality” that one could call *justesse*. The *justesse* of “dramatic logic” represents a transvaluation of contingency. The contingent is no longer the random or the arbitrary, but a gift, whose unowed excessiveness does not negate “mere” necessity, but makes it transparent to the principle that, as Plato saw, is the source of the cogency of the necessary itself: the Good or Love.²⁵ Third, given the first two points, our perception of the cogency of “dramatic logic” must itself be dramatic. That is, it is not simply a matter of assenting automatically to a neutral inference,

²⁴I borrow this latter phrase from the title of Seth Benardete’s *The Argument of the Action: Essays on Greek Poetry and Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

²⁵What I mean by *justesse* corresponds roughly to what Medieval theology calls “fittingness” (*convenientia*). “Fittingness,” analogously to “singularity,” expresses a kind of intelligibility that lies beyond the alternative between contingency and necessity in that it fuses in one the gratuitous and the non-arbitrary. “Fittingness” thus recommends itself as a category for capturing the kind of cogency displayed by a “logic of gift.” To take just one example of the Medieval use of “fittingness” that illustrates its connection with a “logic of gift,” at the very beginning of the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* (III, 1, 1), Aquinas observes that, while God did not have to become incarnate, it was fitting [*conveniens*] for him to do so, because he is the Good, and it belongs to the nature of the Good to communicate itself. Thomas’ argument is as follows. Something befits a thing when it comports with its nature. God is the Good. Therefore, whatever comports with the nature of the Good befits God. But self-communication to the maximal degree comports with the Good. Such self-communication occurs when created nature is united hypostatically to the divine nature, that is to say, when God becomes incarnate. Therefore, it was fitting for God to become man. Now, Aquinas carefully distinguishes fittingness from strict necessity in this argument. All of God’s actions *ad extra*, including the Incarnation, are free on God’s part. Nothing constrains or obliges him to perform them. But, if we reflect for a moment, we realize that this absence of obligation or constraint imparts to God’s free actions the connotation of liberal gift-givings. But this brings us back to Aquinas’ point about God’s being the self-communicating Good. Because God’s “*ad extra*” acts bring about non-divine effects, they can manifest him *only* as a generous Giver. But, and this is the point, *that is “most of all” who God is*. God’s *ad extra* acts, then, exhibit an intelligibility that transcends strict necessity to root itself in God’s inmost nature as Love—an intelligibility Aquinas calls “fittingness” and that I shall be calling *justesse* in what follows.

but involves a personal being-affected by, and being committed to, the truth to which one assents. That this full-bodied assent is not irrationality, but, on the contrary, the quintessence and paradigm of rationality, is an argument that must be left for another occasion.²⁶

(b) In (1), we saw that God's "economy" vis-à-vis the world that the Scriptures record has a dramatic form, because it is the "story" of God's gift of created freedom and of his subsequent retrieval of it from within—ultimately as the central human character of that story. We then saw in (2) that dramatic form contains a distinctive "dramatic logic." Can we not appropriately speak, then, of a "dramatic logic of Providence? Now, just as the "logic" of the drama crystallizes around an outcome that unveils, in a manner at once fitting and unexpected, the unique-universal meaning of the singular, so, too, we can expect the "dramatic logic" of Providence to crystallize around historically singular actions. Better: around a complex, but unified structure in which decisive singular action is both matched and exceeded by an outcome or crowning that is (therefore) at once fitting and surprising. In saying this, we delineate the outlines of the Paschal Mystery, in which the Cross (the decisive singular action of Jesus' loving obedience unto death) is matched and exceeded by the Resurrection. If, then, we can speak of a "dramatic logic of Providence," and if the Paschal Mystery is the apex of God's response to evil, suffering, and death, we can say the Paschal Mystery is the chief "argument" of a divine "theodicy" proposed by and in accordance with Providence's "dramatic logic." As suggested above, our perception of the cogency of "dramatic logic" will depend centrally on our ability to grasp its *justesse*, its supremely fitting "rightness." This is true, not only because Providence's "dramatic logic" is one of gift, but because the *justesse* of this gift-logic forces us to rethink the criteria in terms of which we would assess the justice of Providence's permission of evils—which, as noted above, is the central issue at stake in the problem of evil. The justice of God's *ad extra* actions, including that of his permission of evil, can only be such a *justesse*, since whatever God "owes" his creatures he owes on the basis of a groundless liberality by which he not only gives, but commits himself to an uttermost fidelity to the consequences of his gift. The task before us now will be to show how

²⁶For further details, see the above-cited work of D.C. Schindler, *The Dramatic Structure of Truth*.

Christ, by embodying that fidelity, is the enfleshed proof of the *justesse*/justice of God's long patience with evil—and, just so far, God's own theodicy in the flesh.

III. Christ: God's own theodicy in the flesh

The problem of evil, as I have formulated it, concerns the justice of Providence's "permission" of evil. In the previous section of the essay, I claimed that Christ's Paschal Mystery, as the hinge of an enfleshed "dramatic logic" of Providence, responds directly to this question about divine justice by embodying this justice concretely and effectively as a supreme *justesse* of gift. Before going on to describe the substantive content of Christ's enfleshed theodicy, however, we need to ponder for a moment the fact that it defies exhaustive description or analysis. Not only does the "dramatic logic" of Providence oblige us to look for a kind of coherence that transcends simple necessity to include a gratuitous presence incarnated in a singular, unrepeatable figure, but, for that very reason, it concentrates all the light it has to shed on the question of evil in the vulnerability of a single, naked body. Indeed, at the apex of God's "dramatic logic," Christ conquers evil by entering into, and taking to its logical conclusion, the seeming "powerlessness" of the good that raises the problem of evil in the first place. In his Passion, Christ is exposed to the full fury of evil, and he is not rescued until he has "tasted death for every man" (Heb 2:10). Christ on the Cross experiences what Balthasar calls "Godforsakenness" (*Gottverlassenheit*) for our sake. And yet, the very thing that makes God's providential "logic" so mysterious—the fact that the Cross resists exhaustive two-dimensional mapping—is actually an argument in its favor, for evil, as we have seen, poses an intellectual problem that can be resolved only by means of a "dramatic logic." Thus, we should expect the definitive answer to the question of evil to come in the form precisely of a decisive singular action that so carries the evidence of its *justesse* in itself that the force of this evidence can remain hidden—can be "deferred," so to speak, until the Third Day. The Resurrection, in fact, is the surprising and fitting outcome that reveals the sheer, naked presence of the Crucified to have been the central singular deed on which the coherence of the whole theodrama, the *justesse* of God's world-plan, hinges.

But what light, it may be asked, does the naked presence of Christ as God's enfleshed theodicy shed on the question of evil? One classical answer is found in Thomas, who argues that God uses man's Fall as an occasion to reveal his ever-greater love in the Incarnation. Echoing Augustine, Thomas lays it down that God is "so powerful that he can bring good out of evils [*bene facere de malis*]." ²⁷ To be sure, God does not positively choose evil, as if evil could be intrinsic to the natural fulfillment of the cosmos. Echoing Dionysius, Thomas says that "evil is not in existents as a part or as a natural property of any thing." ²⁸ And yet, God does not make it *impossible* for evil to occur. Why? Thomas' most global and most concrete answer is that God judges, in his logic of gift, that it is *better* to have a fallen world on which to bestow the supreme gift of Christ the Redeemer than an unfallen world having no need of such a gift:

[N]othing prevents human nature from having been brought to something greater after sin, for God permits evils in order to bring something better out of them. This is why it says in Rom 5 "where sin abounded, grace superabounded." This is also why it is said at the blessing of the Paschal candle "O, happy fault, which merited to have such a great Redeemer." ²⁹

²⁷ST I, 48, 1, ad 3.

²⁸ST I, 48, 3, ad 1.

²⁹ST III, 3, ad 3. Would Christ have come if man had not sinned? Thomas argues that Scripture offers no grounds for affirming this proposition. Scotus, by contrast, argues that the fact of sin cannot have been a sufficient motive for the Incarnation, which must be sought rather in the loving liberality of the Creator. Careful examination shows that Thomas and Scotus are closer than one might be led to believe by textbook discussions of the Thomist-Scotist controversy surrounding the motive of the Incarnation. In any case, it seems to me that both Thomas and Scotus can be read as converging towards a position that attempts to hold together both a certain absoluteness and a certain relativity in God's decree of the Incarnation. Put in dramatic terms: God's contingent response to sin in the form of the mission of the Redeemer is his carrying out of what he had always already intended in the deepest recesses of his creative wisdom and love. I am reminded here of Ilúvatar's rebuke of Melkor at the beginning of Tolkien's *Silmarillion*: "Mighty are the Ainur, and mightiest among them is Melkor; but that he may know, and all the Ainur, that I am Ilúvatar, those things that ye have sung, I will show them forth, that ye may see what ye have done. And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not

Before we dismiss Aquinas' argument as expressing a facile Leibnizian optimism *ante litteram*, we need to consider that God cannot create finite freedoms incapable of sinning by nature. Finite freedom can be created unfallen, as we believe that it was. But, insofar as it is created *ex nihilo*, it cannot be confirmed in the good short of heavenly beatitude. Nor could a mere creature begin its existence in heavenly beatitude, which by definition is an end-state that the creature has yet to reach through historical action. Even the as yet unfallen Adam, created in "original justice," was not confirmed in the heavenly good, but would have had to attain it by means of an act of free obedience. Consequently, if God is going to create finite freedom, he has to permit evil, at least in principle.³⁰ The real question concerning God's permission of evils, then, is not whether or not he should permit them, because, given finite freedom, *he has no choice*, at least in principle. The real question is whether or not finite freedom should be "given" at all: that is, whether or not God should create a world containing finite freedom in the first place. Now, when Thomas appeals to Christ to guarantee the justice of God's permission of evils, he may be taken as suggesting that Christ's very presence in the world is the enfleshed proof of the rightness, of *justesse*, of God's decision to do so. One of the ways in which Christ offers this proof is by promoting human freedom in his own person to its eschatological perfection—and, in that very act, definitively securing its creaturely integrity from within. As Adrienne von Speyr often says, in taking flesh, the Son reassures the Father that his creation of finite freedom was not a mistake, but was worth the risk. Of course, the price of this reassurance is nothing less than the suffering of the Cross.

This christocentric reading of the classical "*bonum ex malis*" theodicy suggests three interrelated ways in which Christ's enfleshed presence sheds light on why God's justice permits evils to occur in the world that it rules over and displays itself in. (1) The first is that

imagined" (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1977], 6).

³⁰This does not mean, of course, that finite freedom as such is evil or even that it is essentially a hesitation between good and evil. Finite freedom is not created confirmed in the good, but it is created unfallen, with a natural tendency towards the good, which, however, because of its peculiar ontological constitution, can be—although need not and should not be—turned against God and back in on itself in a perverse self-affirmation. For more details, see footnote 34.

finite freedom is created unfallen, but cannot be created incapable of falling. (2) Second, God, the Giver of freedom, values it enough that, when it does in fact fall, he wishes to turn it back to himself *from within*, that is, inclusively of human freedom's own participation in the process of return. Consequently, God must go about the work of Redemption with patient slowness. Anything quicker, any more forceful act of rendering evil *a priori* impossible, or of suddenly uprooting it from the human heart, would suppress precisely what God seeks to promote: free human obedience. Seen in this light, the fact that God appears to delay in redressing evil is not a disconfirmation of his Providence, but rather an index, or a shadow, of its implacable sureness. (3) Third and finally, God can allow evil to enter the world through finite freedom in the "confidence" that, in the fullness of time, the eternal Son will assume human freedom in order to complete the process of restoring it from within, by means of a fully free, fully human act of obedience "unto death on the Cross," which expresses, in the language of temporal human action, the eternal Son's constitutive self-reception from the Father. The Son's obediential love justifies the divine patience by savingly restoring finite freedom and, in that act, allowing finite freedom to share in its own restoration³¹:

[F]or all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, being justified as a free gift by his grace through the ransom in Christ Jesus, whom God proposed as a propitiation through faith in his blood, in order [thereby] to show his righteousness in that he overlooked the sins that had gone before in the patience of God so as to show his righteousness in the present time, in that he is just himself and justifies him who is of the faith of Jesus (Rom 3:23-26).

³¹Even as man, of course, Christ is not the one who is saved, but the one who saves. Nevertheless, he works salvation through the *admirabile commercium*, whereby he puts himself so to say in our place in order that we might co-occupy his. It is in this precise and specific sense, then, that we can speak of Christ's embodying saved man's participation in the act that saves him. The simultaneous difference and unity between Christ's unique human act of salvation and our participation therein is revealed in the fact that this participation of ours has to pass through the Church, the feminine counterpart to the masculine Bridegroom-Redeemer that is drawn from his side on the Cross and embodied anticipatorily in the figure of Mary under the Cross.

Of course, this three-fold apology for God's permission of evil as a form of patient respect for finite freedom is likely to remain unsatisfying, because it seems to beg a crucial question: even supposing that God's decision to create finite freedom obliges him to stand by the consequences of its fall, was it *right* for God to create finite freedom in the first place, especially if he knew that its fall would indirectly bring about suffering for untold numbers of innocents? The response to this question, like the response to the previous ones, requires that we keep our eyes fixed on the Crucified, whose enfleshed theodicy forces us to rethink the criteria in terms of which we would judge the rightness of God's actions. On the Cross, the Innocent suffers for the guilty. Justice is done to "the uttermost farthing," but in such a way that this justice expresses *mercy*. Towards whom? Towards everyone—since "all have sinned"—including us who are questioning the rightness of God's risking the innocent suffering of his creatures without consulting them beforehand. In other words: the Cross uncomfortably "personalizes" the question of God's justice vis-à-vis innocent suffering in two interrelated ways. First, it makes us see that we, too, bear responsibility for the innocent suffering of others because of our sin. Second, by nonetheless extending mercy to us, the Cross also makes us see that our finite freedom is one of the objects of the divine patience that seems so scandalous to us. It follows from this that, if we deny God the "right" to risk creatures' innocent suffering, we deny that our own freedom is worth having patience with, and, for the same reason, we deny the worth of our own being. And if our being is worthless, then so, too, is the being of all the innocent sufferers on whose behalf we claim to be protesting. The Cross shows us that, if we deny God's "right" to create a world such as ours, we embrace, at least implicitly, a self-defeating nihilism that simply does away with the human occasions of our scandal and places them definitively beyond hope.

As we would expect in the context of a "dramatic logic," the answer to the problem of evil that Christ embodies is one with which we must struggle personally in order to understand. But, in the midst of this struggle, we come to see, and to experience first-hand, that God's patience, however scandalous we deemed it at first, is supremely just. Here justice means, not accountability to some external standard of procedural fairness, but God's fidelity to his own gift-giving, which commits him to do whatever is necessary to restore fallen freedom, and yet to do so from within—a double

requirement whose only solution is the Cross.³² Once again, the Crucified is the self-display of divine justice, which carries in itself the evidence of its own *justesse*—as the unsurpassable rightness of infinite love. If my argument has seemed circular, it is because it has circled around this unique Presence of God’s own theodicy in the flesh, which convinces either by itself—or not at all. It is not the arguments of his “friends,” but the appearance of God himself, that convinces Job of God’s justice. Shakespeare, too, captures something of this self-authenticating character of God’s self-manifestation in history in the figure of the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, who suddenly emerges from disguise at the end of the play to pronounce judgment tempered with mercy. This exchange between the Duke and Isabella is particularly striking:

DUKE: You are pardoned, Isabel./And now, dear maid, be you
as free to us./Your brother’s death I know sits at your heart,/
And you may marvel why I obscured myself,/Labouring to save
his life, and would not rather/Make rash remonstrance of my
hidden power/Than let him be so lost. O most kind maid,/It

³²In one sense, God’s decision to create finite freedom, and so (necessarily) to run the risk that sin and suffering will enter the world, is neither “fair” nor “unfair.” It expresses, rather, a sheer liberality that is prior to the order in which “fair” and “unfair” first become relevant categories. We would be wrong, however, to conclude from this that God’s liberality is arbitrary. Far from being capricious, God’s liberality manifests a supreme goodness in which freedom, wisdom, and love are perfectly one in infinite fullness. God’s liberal donation of being expresses a benevolent intention that, in force of that very liberality, he pledges himself to fulfill—no matter what. In this sense, we can say that God is “just” vis-à-vis his creature: not because he “owes” anything to the creature in any absolute sense, or because he is accountable to the creature on the latter’s terms, but because he remains faithful to his own boundless generosity—and to nothing less than that. God’s justice towards his creatures, then, is the *justesse* appropriate to a Giver who remains irrevocably committed to the logic of gift, even and especially when the creature tries to remove itself from that logic. In that case, God’s *justesse*/justice takes the form of returning the creature to the orbit of gift with an implacable urgency that can become, where necessary, a punitive ferocity, the “wrath of God” of which Paul speaks in Romans 1. At the same time, God’s act of restoring the creature to the right path witnesses to his fidelity to his gift in another way: he retrieves creaturely freedom with utmost respect for creaturely freedom, involving it, to the extent possible, in its own restitution. But where do these two seemingly contrary aspects of God’s fidelity to his gift—his punitive, one might say, purgative wrath, on the one hand, and his “ineffable courtesy” (as Michelangelo puts it), on the other—converge if not in the Cross?

was the swift celerity of his death,/Which I did think with
slower foot came on,/That brained my purpose. But peace be
with him!/That life is better life, past fearing death,/Than that
which lives to fear. Make it your comfort,/So happy is your
brother.

ISABELLA: I do, my lord.³³

The Crucified himself, I have argued, is God's own theodicy in the flesh. As Paul observes at the beginning of 1 Cor, the wisdom of this theodicy can seem like folly. This is not because it is illogical, however, but because it embodies the logic of a love so absolute that it is prepared to do the unthinkable: to give of itself so unstintingly to the creature as to make itself vulnerable to the creature's misuse of the gift.³⁴ It would be wrong to conclude from this, however, that God sacrifices his omnipotence in order to make himself vulnerable. Christ does not just die under the weight of the world's sin, like Myshkin in the arms of Rogozhin, but conquers it, casting it into hell and rising again on the Third Day. If we can speak of a veritable "drama of powerless love" that God enacts with his creatures, even to the point of the Cross, it is not because God ceases to be omnipo-

³³William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act 5, Scene 1, 384-396, in *The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 814.

³⁴This sheds light on the thorny question of how finite freedom can fall. God is a liberal Giver who gives the creature to itself, putting it into its own hands, so that it can give itself back to him in a new act. This new act, too, is God's gift, yet God gives it in such a way that it is also the creature's. To the extent possible, God wants the creature to *experience it also as its own*—in the form of gratitude, in which total dependence and participation in the Giver's gratuity are one and the same. God's creative presence to the creature, while never lacking, nonetheless contains a moment of what we can only think of as "absence," "withdrawal," and "handing over." The point, to repeat, is not that God ever ceases to be present; he is never so present as in these modes, which, rightly understood constitute a kind of excess of presence. But, for precisely this reason, God, while never absent, *can look as though he is*—first and foremost to the creature that is supposed to experience God's gift as also its own in the form of gratitude. Given God's apparent absence, and given that the creature is positively invited to be glad that it is other than God, the gift of ontological freedom to the creature necessarily entails the *logical* possibility, although not the necessity or desirability, of the creature's misusing God's "absence" *against* God, in order to claim that its being and action are its own, underived from any source other than itself. It is thus not necessary to look beyond the gift of freedom itself for a cause of evil. The gift itself is so radically gift that it includes in itself the possibility of, and vulnerability to, its own sinful misuse.

tent, but because he manifests his omnipotence precisely by forbidding himself any “cheap victory” that would bypass the long, unstinting patience of the Incarnation and the Passion. Indeed, it is just this patience that manifests divine omnipotence and assures its victory. For, if God accomplishes whatever he wishes, it is precisely because his power is *not* an arbitrary force, but the ability to give being, indeed, the ability to ensure the reception of the gift of being according to his will without overriding the freedom that he gives with that gift.³⁵ The Cross, which is just the *concretissimum* of God’s almighty power to accomplish his will with his creature without force, makes out of the mysterious powerlessness of the good that gives rise to the scandal of evil the very means by which divine omnipotence triumphs over evil. The heart of the Christian response to the problem of evil is the affirmation that the “powerlessness” of the good, of Christ on the Cross, is itself the victory of omnipotent love over evil, suffering, and death—a victory that comes to light, of course, only “on the Third Day” when the Crucified rises from the Tomb bearing the wounds of his Passion.³⁶

In concluding this section, I would like to address two questions that remain with respect to this claim:

(1) Has Christ’s presence as an enfleshed theodicy really changed the situation of man and of the cosmos with respect to suffering and sin? Isn’t it rather the case that, after the coming of Christ, the world is as bad as it ever was, *especially in Christian countries*? Didn’t Nazism arise in nominally Christian Germany? We have to acknowledge a certain truth in this objection. Christ brings

³⁵Does this mean that no creature can end up in hell? Or, alternatively, that God’s salvific will is limited? Can we affirm that God’s saving will is both almighty and universal without for all that affirming that no one can possibly go to hell? Both Augustine and the Magisterial Reformers think that we cannot do so, and so limit God’s saving will to a relatively small number of elect souls, lest his omnipotence oblige him to make hell an impossibility for anyone. It seems to me that this limitation, although reasonable from a certain point of view, short-circuits our appreciation of the mystery of evil, which stands out in relief only when we hold fast both to the omnipotence and universality of God’s saving will, on the one hand, and to the possibility of a creature’s ending up in hell, on the other.

³⁶I do not mean, of course, to restrict Christian theodicy to Christology. In the end, we can understand the (to us) strange logic behind the vulnerable omnipotence displayed on the Cross only in light of the Trinity as the eternal event of “vulnerable omnipotence,” in which Ultimate Reality subsists only in and as communion.

absolute love into the world—and, with it, new possibilities, not only of opposition from without, but also of betrayal, profanation, and scandal from within. Judas betrays Jesus after having received the Eucharist from his Master's own hands. And yet, the very fact that evil can sink to unheard-of new depths with the coming of Christ only confirms, negatively, that the world *has* indeed changed. The proof of this change is not that evil and suffering have been removed from the world. The proof, as befits the theo-dramatic logic of God's Providence, is a more hidden one. It is none other than Christ's redemptive suffering on the Cross. In voluntarily consenting to suffer under the weight of the world's sin, Christ retrieves the gift-character of finite freedom in the affirmative gratitude that fulfills it as a share in the Creator's liberality, and so embodies the original goodness of creation as an incarnate reality—not alongside of this world, its suffering, and its evil, but in the very midst of them. Thanks to Christ's redemptive deed, then, we do not have to treat the ontological superiority of the good as a mere "ideal," belonging, perhaps, to a lost paradise or to a future utopia, but can affirm it as a present reality, as the deepest and truest reality of the real, despite the *de facto* fallenness of the world and the suffering it causes. Better, not simply despite evil and suffering, but, so to say, "underneath" them: in an ultimate bedrock of absolute love that is victorious over all evil precisely because it *unterwandert* evil through the most extreme Godforsakenness. This does not mean, of course, that Christ invites us to approve of evil as evil. It simply means that, by enduring in loving affirmation under the weight of the world's No, Christ is the incarnate pledge of a hope that no situation is too extreme for God to retrieve—and, in principle, to have always already retrieved "from below." In a word, Christological hope allows us to maintain the ontological primacy of the good beyond the extremes of a refusal to accept things "as they are" and a capitulation to the *status quo*, of self-righteous moralism and cynical *Realpolitik*.³⁷

³⁷The fruitfulness of Christ's method of defeating evil on the Cross is demonstrated by the presence of Mary, at once redeemed and co-redemptress, at its foot—a presence that stands, by way of anticipation, for the whole Church, which prolongs Christ's enfleshed theodicy through all time. True, the Church is full of sinners and, perhaps even worse, of mediocrities whose opacity dampens the light of God's love. And yet, the Church is the "Church of the saints," as Bernanos, who tasted the full bitterness of the scandal of the Church, nonetheless continued

(2) But, it will be objected, how does Christ's enfleshed theodicy explain the fact of innocent suffering? In one sense, of course, it does not and cannot explain innocent suffering at all—if by “explanation” we mean a reduction of the phenomenon of innocent suffering to some obvious functional purpose. Nevertheless, Christ's enfleshed theodicy does shed on innocent suffering what light *can* be shed on it. By suffering innocently out of love himself, Christ gives innocent suffering a meaning, not in some functional purpose, but in the non-functionalizable, gratuitous love it indirectly occasions.³⁸ Of course, it remains deeply mysterious that God should have created a world in which suffering was possible. Indeed, the fact that our bodies are bound up with the world that surrounds us, the fact that we are radically exposed without any *ultimate* protection for our embodied existence, lends a certain plausibility to the oft-heard claim that the universe does not reflect the Providence of a loving Father, but an utterly amoral indifference to the human drama.

to insist. The phenomenon of sanctity, renewed generation after generation from the heart of the Church, makes present again and again Christ's victory over concupiscence, suffering, and death. Only a few witnessed the Resurrection of Jesus first hand. For the rest of us, the joy of the saints in the midst of their tribulations is the “physical evidence” that our old world has been decisively renewed, and is now separated by only the slightest curtain from the “new heavens and a new earth.”

³⁸Suffering, as an unchosen, and so violent, dissolution of the integrity of our being is a consequence of sin that, presumably, would not have existed but for the disharmony the Fall has introduced into the cosmos. Nevertheless, suffering as we know it in our fallen world presupposes, as a remote condition, what one could call a “kenotic” moment that is built into the original form of finite being as gift (and that, we could add, reflects a transcendent foundation in the being of God as Trinitarian gift). Insofar as their being is a gift, in fact, finite entities are caught up—willy nilly—in a “dynamic of gift,” in that they are always already broken out of themselves before any choice of their own. This fact, I am saying, is a “pre-fallen” ancestor of what suffering becomes in a fallen world. What we know as suffering enters the world with the Fall, inasmuch as men and angels refuse, and attempt to contravene, the “kenotic moment” inscribed in their being. By the same token, in a post-Fall situation, the voluntary acceptance of the suffering that this refusal causes can become an occasion for revitalizing that “kenotic moment” and, just so far, for compensating for, and, indeed, exceeding the evil of sinful creatures' No to it. But this is precisely what Christ does on our behalf, and in such a way as to enable us to do it as well in our turn. At that very moment, Christ makes evil and suffering occasions for the manifestation of ever-greater Love despite themselves—thus giving them a meaning that, if we are persuaded by the theodicy Christ enfleshes, justify God's permission of them.

Now, there is no doubt that the world displays a *certain* impersonal objectivity, inasmuch as it imposes itself on each and all, demanding to be accepted, just as it is, hard edges and all. And yet, precisely by reminding man of his radical finitude in this seemingly rude way, the world shows itself to be, not implacably alien to man and his purposes, but . . . just the condition of the possibility of a real freedom that performs real actions with real consequences. Indeed, the hard-edged character of the world, which has always already broken us out of ourselves without consulting us and whether we like it or not, makes us experience *physically* the *spiritual* law that in order to find oneself, one must lose oneself—not calculatingly, but in the logic of gift one's own body enfleshes in its exposure to the world. If self-gift were simply a matter of choice for us, we would never perform it. Indeed, we would be positively incapable of performing it. Seen in its deepest truth, that is, in the light of the Cross, the seeming impersonality of the universe is thus not the expression of an amoral unconcern for persons, but rather of a Providential Love that educates them to a love that affirms the world *as it is*, without picking and choosing—and, in so doing, brings the gift of freedom to perfection, not as arbitrary velleity, but as unselfregarding Yes-saying to, and celebration of, the gift of being, that is, as *joy*.

IV. *Everyday joy, universal responsibility*

Joy, I said in the introduction, is the distinctive *ethos* of the Christian. So much so that Paul can tell the Thessalonians to “rejoice always” (1 Thess 5:16). But the unceasing joy the Apostle commands is not an ephemeral state of mind, a temporary euphoric “high.” It is not primarily a state of mind at all, if by that is meant a felt experience. Rather, it is an unshakeable conviction that life, every life, is both liveable and worth living, a conviction demonstrated not in the dizziness of extraordinary exaltation, but in the sober normality of the everyday. As Chesterton put it, “joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian.”³⁹

Chesterton surely would have been alive to the intimations of everyday joy in “pagan” existence. One particularly powerful

³⁹G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 167.

intimation is procreation, which is the expression of an unspoken confidence that life is liveable and worth living, the testimony to a tacit agreement that it is indeed just to bring new human beings into it, a celebratory joy that challenges the claims of evil *in actu exercitu*. This celebratory joy becomes more explicit in the traditions that assure the sexual transmission of life a universal significance within the intergenerational history of a culture. It is a striking fact that the bearers of most, if not all, pre-technological cultural traditions are masters of celebration in song, story, and dance—striking because these people have, or had, a much fuller experience of the hardness and shortness of this life than we, their descendants, who live to a healthy old age in our climate controlled world. The music, the story, the dance of the world's cultural traditions thus stand as a fragile, yet irresistible proof of mankind's native confidence in the ontological primacy of the good over evil. Stalin could enslave millions through terror. But Stalinism could only destroy life, not transmit it. No human power can restore Stalin's victims to life, and that reminds us, once again, of the mysterious vulnerability of the good. And yet, the power to destroy without giving life is an ultimate feebleness and sterility. In this respect, the traditional, craftsmanly cultivation of the means of collective celebration in music, song, and story is infinitely more powerful than evil: unlike evil, it is inexhaustibly fruitful, giving and enhancing life from generation to generation. The longevity, resourcefulness, and creative fruitfulness of tradition amount to a gesture of "natural hope" that, as such, is a sign, in the midst of the everyday, pointing discreetly to the Redemption.

To embrace the everydayness of joy is to refuse the subtle temptation lurking in the feelings of guilt or inadequacy that come over us when we weigh our small lives against the burden of the world's sin. If we succumb to this temptation, if, overwhelmed by the spectacle of evil, we despise the seemingly trivial normality of our quotidian lives, then we effectively deny that the good has an absolute priority over evil. We adjudge evil a premature and undeserved victory over the good, and so become complicit in it. Indeed, if we are consistent, we end up embracing the nihilism of the suicide bomber, who, in order to fight what he judges to be evil, throws away the normality of his and others' lives in a gesture that, ironically, reproduces the radical No to the gift of being that is the source of evil in the world in the first place. I do not mean, of course, that quiet rejoicing in the normality of the everyday is an

excuse for an apolitical quietism. My point is simply that, without joy, political engagement inevitably degenerates into fanaticism (or cynical power-seeking—the two are often intertwined). Islamist terrorism is a somber example of how a reaction to evil (whatever legitimacy it might claim to have in principle) that is not anchored in everyday joy will not only reflect a merely human justice, instead of the incorruptible and absolute justice of God, but, for that same reason, will sooner or later adopt the weapons of evil itself.

For all of its unassuming quietness, however, everyday joy is not a bourgeois self-insulation from evil, but the fundamental form of resistance to it. Everyday joy, with its radical, comprehensively lived Yes to finitude, stands against the denial of finitude, the short-circuiting of the “patience of the flesh,” that is the primal source of evil in the first place. Of course, everyday joy conducts this resistance, not by adopting the logic of evil, but by remaining within the logic of the good in its vulnerability and exposure, even to the point of suffering. Paradoxically, however, it is just this vulnerability that proves more powerful than the seeming power of evil: by suffering out of love, in fact, joy retrieves the dynamic of gift inscribed in finite freedom, the dynamic refused by sin, and so offers itself as a living pledge, in flesh and blood, of the intact goodness of creation. Note, moreover, that joy offers this pledge *in the midst of the suffering caused by evil*. Everyday joy does not say Yes merely to finite existence as it should have been, but also to finite existence as it is in its fallenness—but in such a way that, at that very moment and in that very act, it makes how finite existence should have been how it in fact most truly is. Everyday joy, then, is at once a claim that the good is ontologically primary with respect to evil and the deed that backs the claim up, with a force that transcends the dialectic between a merely human “good” (a moralistic, hysterical self-righteousness), on the one hand, and an all too human “tolerance” of evil, on the other. If accounting for evil requires taking it seriously without losing our grip on the absolute ontological primacy of the good, then everyday joy, even and especially when lived out in the midst of suffering, is not an evasion of the problem of evil, but the only adequate response to it.

Everyday joy does not answer the problem of evil only for the person who rejoices, however. On the contrary: just as everyday joy “gets underneath”—“*unterwandert*”—the radical source of evil, it reaches out to embrace all who are affected by it in any way. To rejoice in the everyday is to live one’s whole life, in all of its details,

even the most trivial, as a form of universal responsibility. Of course, if joy can spend itself in responsibility “on behalf of all and for all,” as the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom puts it, it is not because it is a voluntaristic heroism, but because it is the recognition that one’s own life is a gift—a recognition born of, and sustained ongoingly by, the gratuitous initiative of the Other who gives that life in the first place: God in Christ. Indeed, our joyful responsibility for others is enfolded within Christ’s act of what Balthasar calls “substitution” or “vicarious representation” (*Stellvertretung*).⁴⁰ Not only has Christ “already overcome the world,” which is cause enough for rejoicing on our part, but, mysteriously, he opens the “time of the Church” for us to participate in this overcoming, which deepens our first joy with the gratitude that Christ takes us seriously enough to make our actions count before God with an eschatological significance. It is this joy—the joy of Mary, who is the archetypal creature *because* she is the Mother of God—that enables us to live the everyday, as universal responsibility, beyond bourgeois self-insulation and heroic posturing.

“Rejoice always.” With these words, Paul seems to be laying on his readers an impossible task. But Paul is no fool. He knows a thing or two about the hardships of living in this world and he is not asking his readers to act as if these trouble did not exist. No, when Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to “rejoice always,” he is reminding them of what has become the fundamental reality of their lives: they now “live with” Christ who conquered death and who, as Paul explains in 1 Thess 4:13–18, will surely come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Christians’ unceasing rejoicing is not the result of any voluntaristic effort to remain in a state of enforced hilarity and fictive serenity. It is an irradiation of the victorious presence of the Risen Christ into the depth of Christians’ being—of which the same Christ has taken possession in Baptism—and out again from them into the world. Christians can “rejoice always,” not because *they* make *themselves* immune to suffering, but because the Risen Christ has transferred them into a state—the state of Christian existence itself—whose very objective structure is joy, even in the midst of trials. This joy need not always

⁴⁰If we consider that Christ, the singular *par excellence*, is not a mere individual, but the “representative” man who stands for all of us, we can say that Christ contains us and all that we do—in such a way as to enable us to become “theodramatic persons” who are not mere individuals, but inclusive singulars in their own right (and that is just what persons are).

be consciously felt, but it is so all-encompassingly powerful that it can turn even suffering into a sacrament of the encounter with Christ, into participation in heavenly life, without requiring any "artificial sweetening." What we cannot bear remains unbearable for us, but not for him, who bears us up even (and especially) when we threaten to be overwhelmed. As Paul says elsewhere, nothing can separate us from the love of the Risen Christ; nothing can shake the joyful confidence that the world is in the hands of a Father who is "faithful and . . . will do" (1 Thess 5:24) what he has promised. □

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