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A Theodical Invitation

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A THEODICAL INVITATION

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by

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Evil as Nonrational	2
Answering Evil: Theory or Pragmatics?	5
A Body in Cruciform	6
The Church as Christ's Body	6
The Cruciform of Love	7
Come Taste and Feel	9
Dialogue with the Christian Tradition	9
Liturgy as Action Against Evil.....	10
Conclusion	11
Bibliography	12

Introduction

During the rising action that led to WWII, Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointedly described his context in Germany, writing, “Today we have villains and saints again, in full public view. The gray on gray of a sultry, rainy day turned into the black cloud and bright lightening flash of a thunderstorm.”¹ Indeed, as a conspirator against Hitler and eventually a prisoner of the Gestapo, Bonhoeffer intimately understood evil. The 20th Century, containing horrific genocides, brutal wars, and fresh evils, orients the world to face the reality of evil. For Christianity, the problem of evil, in all of its historical manifestations, presents an opportunity and challenge. With a history that reaches back to some of the earliest texts, such as Job and Genesis, evil is humanity’s ever-present parasite—a constant degrading of goods. In the current postmodern context and with the rise of Christian movements rejecting modernity, a theological answer to evil should be developed from postmodern theology.² While the problem of evil has predominantly been addressed in metaphysical terms, these types of theodicies ultimately fall short in addressing evil as a social, immanent reality that is primarily known on the non-rational level; making space for a postmodern theodicy, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and James K.A. Smith, in their picture of the Church as a liturgical community that *is* Christ on earth, offer a way of addressing the problem of evil through the Church as an embodied answer and solution.

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, eds. Ilse Tödt, Clifford J. Green, Ernst Feil, and Heinz Tödt, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Vol. 6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 76.

² Certainly, this is only true for a person who believes that modernity has failed to meet its own claims. Philosophically, American Pragmatism, Postmodern Philosophy, French Phenomenology, and Continental Philosophy all present arguments, explicitly or implicitly, against modernity by rejecting various proposals of the Enlightenment. In theology, Radical Orthodoxy, Postliberalism, and Feminist Theology are all movements that reject the claims of the Enlightenment.

Evil as Nonrational

Demonstrating how evil is nonrational, not propositionally “capturable,” is the first step in establishing a postmodern theodicy. So much of the literature written about Christianity’s theodicies presupposes many of the Enlightenment’s developments—analytic philosophers, in many ways fruitfully, have carried the mantle of theodicy. Their account, however, is incomplete for the postmodern theologian-philosopher. Due to the acknowledgement that knowledge, at its most basic level, is nonrational,³ postmodern theologians must study evil as a reality that encompasses rational *and* nonrational aspects of the world. Furthermore, because rationality⁴ is ultimately rooted in nonrational knowledge, so too would any rational knowledge of evil. Thus, while the problem of evil can (and should be) addressed as a rational problem, it more fundamentally is something known and experienced nonrationally.⁵ Indeed, suffering surpasses the capacities of rational conceptualization.⁶ Social theorists David Morgan and Iain Wilkinson argue that “measurements to quantify the consequences of affliction in social science tend to trivialize suffering by constantly failing to capture the intensity of personal awareness and its

³ In this paper, nonrational knowledge is defined as the kind of knowledge that cannot be expressed propositionally; rather, this knowledge is understood and shaped on the intuitive, bodily, and social levels. Nonrational knowledge, as understood in this paper, is the kind of knowledge that James K.A. Smith writes about in his development of Bourdieu’s *habitus* and the kind of knowledge that Charles Taylor develops in his concept of the social imaginary. Also, this paper is not arguing *for* these postmodern positions (that would require a much longer paper), rather, it simply “brackets” these contested postmodern positions to develop an argument *given* their truth. James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 80-84. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: First Harvard University Press, 2018), 171-181

⁴ In this paper, rationality is defined as that kind of knowledge that can be understood purely in propositional form. This kind of knowledge allows for the use of symbolic logic as an epistemically certain, self-contained mechanism.

⁵ Contra the modernist view of suffering as isolated, David Morris argues that suffering is communal and shaped by historical communities of discourse. He further argues that understanding evil as operating through plots (i.e., those embodied social narratives that are lived, felt, and shaped by communities) displays the malleable, close, and shapeable natures of evil. His argument shows the importance and the effects of communities re-shaping narratives and acting against evil. David Morris, “The Plot of Suffering: AIDS and Evil,” in *Evil After Postmodernism: Histories, Narratives, and Ethics*, ed. Jennifer L. Geddes (London: Routledge, 2001), 62-63, 64, 71-72.

⁶ David Morgan and Iain Wilkinson, “The Problem of Suffering and the Sociological Task of Theodicy,” *European Journal of Social Theory* (4, no. 2 (May 2001): 199–214. doi:10.1177/13684310122225073), 204-206.

cultural complexity.”⁷ Instead of rationally addressing evil, Morgan and Wilkinson advocate for “thinking with suffering” as the first step in responding to evil.⁸ As a guiding trajectory for a postmodern theodicy, this approach points to the need for existential, social, and local understandings of evils. Over and against “universal” understandings of evil, a postmodern theodicy emphasizes the importance of “suffering with,”⁹ especially through the crucifix form of the Church.

While the postmodern priority on nonrational knowledge gives the general reason for a social, practical theodicy, two further supporting reasons sustain this theodical trajectory: (1) Christian communities of sanctified living offer tangible, nonrational ways to know God’s goodness, and (2) the New Testament emphasizes how the Church is a united social body with a mission of embodied holiness. These two reasons help secure the strength of a social theodicy.

First, relying upon the insights of James K.A. Smith’s liturgical anthropology, the Church offers counter liturgies (i.e., participatory narratives) for the world to experience—such practices (e.g., acts of mercy, confession, giving, communion, and baptism) allow those outside the Church to see, sense, and (often) partake in the Church’s narrative that is oriented toward the eschaton.¹⁰ The Church is its own *polis*, with its own liturgy, tradition, and social imagination; it

⁷ Morgan and Wilkinson, “The Problem of Suffering and the Sociological Task of Theodicy,” 206.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 205, 208-209.

⁹ The act of “suffering with” is also the source of “practical understanding” that Richard Kearney argues is essential to a postmodern response to evil. Kearney writes, “Where speculative theory, epitomized by theodicy, explained evil in terms of ultimate causal or creationist origins, practical understanding is geared toward a more hermeneutic comprehension of the indeterminate, contingent, and singular characteristics of evil—while not abandoning all claim to quasi-universal criteria (that would account for at least a minimally shared sense of evil).” Richard Kearney, “Others and Aliens: Between Good and Evil,” in *Evil After Postmodernism: Histories, Narratives, and Ethics*, ed. Jennifer L. Geddes, (London: Routledge, 2001), 110.

¹⁰ As a neo-Augustinian development of humans as lovers, Smith argues for a liturgical anthropology, over and against anthropologies emphasizing thinking and believing. In Smith’s account, liturgy and social practices (Cf. MacIntyre’s virtue ethics) refer to the same formative dynamic. The liturgical anthropology argues that (1) humans are fundamentally lovers (i.e., intentional), (2) loving always has a telos (i.e., a vision of the good life), (3) habits form a person’s love(s), and (4) such formative habits are communal practices, liturgies that shape people’s loves through their bodily participation. James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural*

is a community both *in* and *for* the world that invites people into itself.¹¹ Indeed, the Reformed tradition teaches the unity of the *sanctorum communio* and the formative power of the sacraments.¹² In this way, the Church liturgically embodies (sometimes unsuccessfully) God’s goodness on earth—this communitarian emphasis points to the possibility of a social theodicy.

Second, the New Testament teaches that the Church *is* Christ’s body on earth, a community embodying the virtues. Romans 12, 1 Peter 2:1-12, and Ephesians 4-6 all point to the proper socio-ethical relations for Christians, and the task of virtuous living given to the Church is not a second-order goal—this calling to walk worthily of the Gospel is at the core of the Church’s purpose.¹³ Quite powerfully, Dietrich Bonhoeffer develops these biblical concepts in *Sanctorum Communio*. Having discussed ethical basic-relations and the concept of community in chapters 2-3, Bonhoeffer turns to an analysis of the Church in chapter 4. He writes, “*Formally speaking, the necessary bond between the basic-relations [i.e., ethical relations] and the empirical form of community, understood as a unique structure, constitutes the essence of the church.*”¹⁴ In this way, the socio-ethical nature of the Church seems to be an essential part of its

Formation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 46-63. Smith also gives an exegesis of the Church’s liturgies. *Ibid.*, 159-214.

¹¹ James K.A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 57-68.

¹² *Heidelberg Catechism*, in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1988), 35, 41-52.

¹³ In the epistle to the Ephesians, Paul begins his teaching on virtuous social living in 4:1 where he writes, “Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε.” Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament* (5th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014), Ephesians 4:1. This transitional phrase (i.e., a Pauline paraenesis) in the epistle’s argument is translated this way: “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, exhort you to walk worthily of the calling to which you were called” (original translation). In the following five verses, Paul instructs the church in Ephesus to embody humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, and peace, all in the uniting bond of the Trinity. The Church is called to walk according to these virtues. This socio-ethical exhortation continues through chapters 4-6, making it a central theme in Ephesians. Furthermore, Paul’s teaching on sanctified Christian living in Ephesians is a token passage for this type of passage outlining the Church’s sociology. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, et. al (Vol. 42. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), xxxvi-lxxvi, 224-228.

¹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, eds. Clifford J. Green and Joachim Von Soosten, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Vol. 1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 125.

telos. Therefore, (1) because the Church, by practicing proper liturgies, extends an invitation to non-Christians to learn and “test” an alternative social imaginary and (2) because the New Testament teaches how the Church is to have certain socio-ethics, a practical and social theodicy presents itself as a live possibility.

Answering Evil: Theory or Pragmatics?

Having explained why a social theodicy is viable, a methodological nuance must be addressed. According to the social theodicy in this paper, both theory and pragmatics play an integral role in answering the difficulties of evil.¹⁵ Philosopher John Culp skillfully outlines how Church practices that mitigate evil and the theology of God’s omnipotence have interacted to produce a reciprocal development of both God’s omnipotence (e.g., the developments of compatibilism, libertarian free will, open theism, etc.) and the Church’s practices.¹⁶ In light of this productive interchange between pragmatics and theory, Culp argues that the “most adequate understanding of the relationship between the practical and the theoretical is a reciprocal relationship in which there is an ongoing interaction between the two that responds to specific experiences of evil.”¹⁷ Culp’s approach aligns with the larger theory of traditions advocated by MacIntyre, which establishes how historically extended traditions of rationality dialectically

¹⁵ This claim stands upon the work of Kevin Vanhoozer, who bridges the (modernist) gap between theory and practice in the concept of wisdom and Christology. Wisdom is both practical and theoretical, and Christ is the wisdom of God. Vanhoozer writes, “Theology involves both theory (knowledge) and practice (life) for the sake of its pastoral function: assisting people to enjoy and glorify God. Perhaps the best way to overcome the theory/practice dichotomy is to let the subject matter of Christian theology determine theology’s task. *Jesus is the word and wisdom of God, the revealer and the redeemer: the way, the truth, and the life.*” These three emphases orient theology and tie together pragmatics and theory. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: a Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 13-14.

¹⁶ John Culp, "Overcoming the Limits of Theodicy: An Interactive Reciprocal Response to Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* (78, no. 3 (12, 2015): 263-76, Doi:10.1007/s11153-015-9525-2), 269-275.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 268.

constitute and shape their practices.¹⁸ Evil, thus, should be understood according to *both* its communal practices and the theories by which it is comprehended.¹⁹

A Body in Cruciform

With the foundational reasons for this argument outlined, namely, (1) the unity of theory and pragmatics, (2) the New Testament's teaching on socio-ethics, (3) the communication of Christianity's social imaginary through liturgy, and (4) the foundation of knowledge as nonrational, this theodicy formally has three integral features: (1) the earthly body of Christ (i.e., the Church) living in cruciform, (2) embodied theories (possibly) explaining God's relation to evil, and (3) liturgical participation as acting against evil. Presupposing skepticism toward classical and purely rational theodicies,²⁰ these three emphases will elucidate the reasons why evil does not constitute a defeater for Christianity.

The Church as Christ's Body

The Church, which is Christ's body on earth, lives in cruciform and therefore embodies Christ's action of "suffering with" that occurred on the cross. To truly understand the cruciform embodiment of the Church, a theology of Christ *as the Church* must be given. On this point, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's insights are highly relevant. In *Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer explains why the sacrament of baptism establishes a close tie between the Church and Christ, and then he explains,

We are then 'baptized into Christ' (εἰς), into the community of his suffering. We become ourselves members of this body, and the community of those who are baptized becomes a body which is none other than Christ's own body. They are thus "in Christ" (ἐν), and 'Christ is in them' The body of Jesus Christ is identical with the new humanity

¹⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 12. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 221-225.

¹⁹ This paper, however, is primarily focused on proposing the social and practical answer to evil, as this aspect of theodicy seems to have been overlooked and neglected.

²⁰ William Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 97-125.

which he has assumed. The body of Christ is his church-community [Gemeinde]. Jesus Christ at the same time is himself and his church-community (1 Cor. 12:12). Since Pentecost Jesus Christ lives here on earth in the form of his body, the church-community This insight reveals the full richness of meaning contained in the concept of the body of Christ.²¹

Here, Bonhoeffer briefly outlines his theology of Christ's body *as* the Church.²² Furthermore, to become truly human is to become a member of Christ, whose incarnation validated and made a way for truly *human* flourishing.²³ While the Church is Christ on earth (i.e., Christians constitute the body's members, and Christ spiritually dwells in the concrete community), Jesus also is bodily in heaven, not purely fused with the Church.²⁴ Lastly, the Church-community is bound together by the Holy Spirit, identified by sanctification, and operates as a *polis in and for* the world.²⁵ This Christological ecclesiology takes seriously the New Testament's teaching and concretely opens the reality of God's goodness to the whole world.

The Cruciform of Love

In Bonhoeffer's first dissertation later published as a book, *Sanctorum Communio*, he details and argues for a sociology of the Church. In the fifth chapter, he gives an extended analysis of how the *sanctorum communio* is a unique sociological type identified by the relations of "being-with-each-other" and "acting-for-each-other."²⁶ Following Christ's example of love,

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, eds. Martin Kuske et al., trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Vol. 4, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 217-218.

²² Various passages that support this position are Gal. 3:23-39, 1 Cor. 12:12-31, Eph. 2:11-22, and Rom. 12:3-5.

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 219. On this point, various liberal theologians have utilized and taken out of context some of Bonhoeffer's statements that emphasize the importance of concreteness and becoming truly human. Bethge, Bonhoeffer's close friend and earliest commentator, sees these developments in Christian humanism as misguided and inconsistent with Bonhoeffer's theology. David H. Hopper, *A Dissent on Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), 19-21.

²⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 220.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 221, 261-280. In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer later develops these ideas and argues that the Church concretely actualizes the reality of Christ in the world; ethics is ultimately Christological, as the good is a holism of the reality of God. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 49, 53, 73-74.

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 191.

the Church is called to suffer vicariously for others.²⁷ The common sociological You-I relation,²⁸ in the Church, becomes complete: “I and You face each other no longer essentially in a demanding, but in a giving way, revealing their hearts that have been conquered by God’s will.”²⁹ In this way, the Church is a “community-of-the-cross.”³⁰ Intercessory prayer, confession, forgiveness, acts of mercy, and bearing with others are all ways that the Church practices cruciform living. The impetus for this “suffering with” is love, which is the reason for Christ’s crucifixion and the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity.³¹

With this theology of cruciformity established, its correlation with postmodern concepts of evil becomes vividly linked. In his analysis of evil, social theorist Thomas Cushman seeks to correct the neglect of evil in sociology by recognizing its ontological status in society; according to Cushman, evil exists when agents intentionally act viciously against others (i.e., evil is *actualized* by agents).³² This vicious action is selfish and overlooks others as inherently valuable. Evil, then, is a kind of anti-cruciformity; it is an inversion of the will toward oneself. While the Church seeks to lovingly bear and suffer with others, those who enact evil seek to manipulate

²⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 188-191. This theme also is strong in Bonhoeffer’s other writings. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1954), 100-103.

²⁸ Early in his argument, Bonhoeffer argues for the necessity of society in order to arrive at selfhood—without the You-I relation of community, self-understanding is impossible. Bonhoeffer writes, “It is our view that *there would be no self-consciousness without community—or better, that self-consciousness arises concurrently with the consciousness of existing in community. Second, we assert that will is by its nature oriented toward other wills.*” Yet, while an “I” is necessarily dependent on a “You,” the “I” remains distinct from its community: “the ‘openness’ of the person demands ‘closedness’ as a correlative, or one could not speak of openness at all.” Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 70, 74, respectively.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 190-191.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 151.

³¹ At the end of his work, Bonhoeffer describes the eschatological goal of the *sanctorum communio* that can be realized, though not fully, in the present time. In his theology, love is integral to the trajectory of the Church. Bonhoeffer writes, “*The community of love becomes visible in hearts who, filled with the Spirit, reveal themselves to each other . . . Here we see love is completed, that is, that we only attain our ‘self’ when we no longer see our own person.*” *Ibid.*, 288.

³² Thomas Cushman, “The Reflexivity of Evil: Modernity and Moral Transgression in the War in Bosnia,” in *Evil After Postmodernism: Histories, Narratives, and Ethics*, ed. Jennifer L. Geddes (London: Routledge, 2001), 81-83, 89, 98.

and use others. Furthermore, Philosopher Richard Kearney describes how people and things alien to a community often become the face of evil—not only is evil actualized by agents (Cf. Cushman), but it often is too hastily associated with the unknown.³³ Kearney argues that an approach of “practical understanding” and “working-through,” where people attain a heuristic understanding of evil that allows them to act against it, offers the best response to evils.³⁴ Christianity, in light of Bonhoeffer’s theology of cruciformity, operates with this dynamic at its very foundation (i.e., Christ, the cornerstone!): the Church suffers with others in order to understand evil and to act against it liturgically. Thus, these two postmodern emphases (i.e., agents as actualizing good/evil and the need to heuristically act against it) are integrally understood by the Church and are ingrained in its cruciform nature.

Come Taste and Feel

Having outlined the first feature of this social theodicy (i.e., the Church as Christ’s cruciform body), the following two features, (1) offering theodical suggestions and (2) acting liturgically against evil, naturally follow the tradition of Christianity like the first feature. A few scholars, most notably James K.A. Smith, are helpful in elucidating these last two concepts.

Dialogue with the Christian Tradition

Having a form of living that does not neglect the reality of pain and suffering, Christianity also gives reasons for why God would allow evil—these reasons are embodied and further understood when one enters the Church-community. For example, William Alston responds to the inductive argument from evil by affirming the creaturehood, fallibility, and subjectivity of humanity.³⁵ When the objector presents an instance of evil and claims it to be

³³ Kearney, “Others and Aliens: Between Good and Evil,” 102-104.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-112.

³⁵ Alston, “The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition,” 120-121.

gratuitous, Alston points to God's balancing of divine interventions and his sustaining of a consistent universe (i.e., too many interventions makes the universe unpredictable), which means there is only an "n" percentage of interventions God can perform.³⁶ And because there could be many unknown evils prevented by God, how can the objector know if this supposed gratuitous evil qualifies for the "n" percent of evils God can stop? Humans are not privy to such knowledge.³⁷ In the Church, this concept corresponds to the childlike trust vested in God—the embodiment of this theory is living joyfully in light of human creaturehood and dependency.³⁸ In this way, as a person objects to Christianity because of evil, they enter into a dialogue with the theories that motivate Christian living,³⁹ and these theories, coupled with their visible incarnations, can offer a holistic response to evil.

Liturgy as Action Against Evil

Intimately coupled with the embodied explanation of theory, the Church must practice liturgies that alleviate, mitigate, and prevent evils in the world. From a postmodern prospective,

³⁶ Indeed, there are things that God, though omnipotent, cannot do. If he wants to maintain certain goods (i.e., free will), he may be unable to act in various ways. Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," 111-113.

³⁷ Ibid., 114.

³⁸ In Article 13, "The Doctrine of God's Providence," The Belgic Confession powerfully expresses this comforting trust. The reformers wrote, "We do not wish to inquire / with undue curiosity / into what he does that surpasses human understanding / and is beyond our ability to comprehend. / But in all humility and reverence we adore the just judgements of God, / which are hidden from us / . . . This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort / since it teaches us / that nothing can happen to us by chance / but only by the arrangement of our gracious / heavenly Father." *The Belgic Confession*, in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1988), 90.

³⁹ Where the Church does not live according to sound doctrine and is corrupted, this social theodicy will not work. This fact leads to two impacts: (1) Christian sanctification (and thus liturgical formation) must be taken seriously and (2) the Church must own up to how it has, at times, failed to "suffer with" others. The Church has even perpetuated evils in certain cases. Smith addresses this issue, and referring to the devoutly Catholic Mafia leader, Michael Corleones, he calls this kind of malformation "the Godfather problem." When Christians carry out the works of the Devil and also partake in the liturgies of the Church, this is not a simple case of hypocrisy; rather, it is a case of contested formation—the effects of participation in liturgies of vice. Christians with malformed loves oriented away from the Kingdom of God (perhaps wrongly making the market, nationalism, or consumerism their telos), reminds the Church that (1) many cultural liturgies run counter Christianity, (2) Christianity is a holistic, not segmented way of life, (3) catechesis (i.e., explaining the *reason* behind liturgies) is necessary, and (4) sanctification is ongoing in this life. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, 165-168, 201-208.

where embodied, communal, and nonrational answers to problems are the most viable, Christianity's rich liturgical roots carry a powerful response to suffering. This is true for at least two reasons. First, liturgy is a way for all people to experience God in his inconspicuousness,⁴⁰ which allows people to know, in some measure, the goodness of God.⁴¹ Thus, liturgy allows the skeptic to *taste and feel* God's holiness. Second, liturgy can actively diminish evil. In the mixed history of the West, liberalism has notably profited and (imperfectly) created flourishing due to the Church's liturgical influence—indeed, liberal governments are strewn with “craters of the Gospel.”⁴² The practices associated with liberty, acts of mercy, human rights, and freedom of speech all find their roots in historical Christianity.⁴³ On a local level, Churches can (and have) provided food for the hungry, supported single mothers, offered resources to the suffering, and listened comfortingly to the cries of those who, like Job, consider God to be their adversary. In these two ways, the Church should continue to liturgically act against evil; albeit with imperfect practitioners, Christ's body on earth is deadlock in a winning battle against evil.

Conclusion

By (1) faithfully acting against evil, (2) concretely communicating the many theodical suggestions developed by Christianity, and (3) incarnately suffering with others as the body of Christ on earth, the Church offers an answer to the problem of evil that demonstrates how Christianity is consistent with the existence of evil. While history presents narratives of horrific evils, Christianity presents a narrative of redemption, one that becomes real in the Church. Where the Church is truly alive, so too will its activities that counter the existence of evil.

⁴⁰ Jason W. Alvis, *The Inconspicuous God: Heidegger, French Phenomenology, and the Theological Turn* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2018), 130-132.

⁴¹ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 49-54

⁴² Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, 91-122.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102-105

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