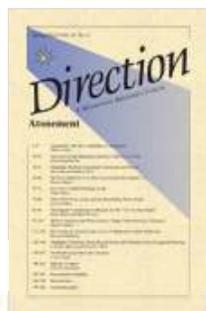




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He Never Meant for Us to Die! An Incursion into Genesis 1–3

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¹ Why did Jesus have to die? The answer to the question that most fundamentally motivates the contemporary debate on the atonement is both simple and infinitely complex. It is partly accessible to reason, but some dimensions of it will, I suspect, forever remain beyond its scope. In fact, the challenge of examining this question resides to a great extent in the fact that it is possible to peek over the chasm and get a hint, even a small glimmer of the ultimate answer. For some, however, this faint realization of the truth proves impossible to bear and drives them to offer an answer that is neither simple nor begins to account for the infinite complexity of the matter. Thus unable to face the painfully blinding light of the scandal of the cross, they choose to find refuge in the desolate plains of human imagination.

Fallen man could only be redeemed by one and only one process: the incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There are, for instance, those who fall back on an explanation of Jesus' death that is rooted in the political. The narrative goes something like this: God never intended for Jesus to die. It was all a misunderstanding. Jesus' discourse irritated the religious and political establishments. He spoke "Truth to Power." As a result, they rejected him. This was all very unfortunate, for Jesus had been sent to show the love of God. Instead of marveling at the great gift Jesus represented, they murdered him. In submitting to this unjust death, Jesus showed us the true face of God and taught us how we

can conquer or absorb violence.

This narrative unfortunately continues to get increasing traction in some Anabaptist circles in great part, I believe, as a result of a profound discomfort with any concept that might potentially link God to violence.²

It is not my intent to rehash in this paper the terms of the atonement debate.³ I happen to side with those who believe, as the Church has from the beginning, that the death of Christ was driven by an ontological necessity. While the precise mechanisms may ultimately prove to be beyond human reason, this is not to say that we have no access at all to some of the structural aspects of the rationale. At a most basic level, the biblical witness unequivocally links the death of Christ to an absolute justice imperative that is an integral part of God's very nature (see for instance Gal. 3:13; Mark 10:45; 14:36; 2 Cor. 5:21).

While I do not pretend to be in a position to uncover the precise nature of the mechanisms that lay behind the cross, I do wish to reach as far back as possible into the chain of events that led to the death of Christ by examining anew some of the more critical elements of the creation story found in Genesis 1–3.

THE CREATION ACCOUNT: LITERARY GENRE

The choice of the creation narrative is motivated by the very nature of the text itself. From a literary perspective, it is a *creation* story, or what some carelessly designate as a myth. I say carelessly, for the creation account does not entirely display the characteristics normally associated with ancient Near Eastern mythology.⁴ In fact, the narrative represents a genre that resists any simple classification.

On the one hand, the creation account exhibits some of the characteristics commonly associated with myth. There are indeed poetic, symbolic, and archetypal elements that address the human condition in general. On one level, the text speaks to all men and women.⁵ Nothing new here. But on the other hand, the story also reflects a historical dimension. It describes two individuals who are portrayed as having a special role to play in the development of the human race and who are explicitly linked to history. From a literary perspective, ancient Hebrew writers were very sophisticated. They knew the difference between legend, myth, and history. Their literary canon did not posit any intrinsic contradiction between

poetry and history. They could weave the one into the other quite expertly.⁶

Beyond the precise literary character of this text, what is most important to note is the significance of a story that is explicitly intended, by virtue of its genre, to provide the basic building blocks required to construct a worldview that corresponds to and reflects ultimate reality.⁷ Therein lies the value of this text for our question.

GOD'S PROJECT: A SPECIAL CREATURE

In order to get a significant insight into the reasons that required the death of Christ, it is essential that we understand how and why evil entered the world, for both the Jesus event and the introduction of evil in history are intricately and organically related.

To account for the presence of evil, we need to reflect on God's motivation to create humanity in the first place. God's original intent was to create a creature that would be like him in one critical respect: It would be endowed with freewill in regard to God. Only such a creature could enter into a loving relationship with God.⁸

But how does one produce such a creature? The question is not as trivial as may appear at first sight. In fact, this is probably where much of the work done on the problem of evil by theologians and philosophers tends to shipwreck. There is often an underlying assumption that the emergence of a creature that would be endowed with free will was, as with the rest of creation, simply a matter of God saying so. The reality, however, is that a creature such as this could not be, by definition, the result of a simple act of creation by fiat.

First, from a logical point of view, the creation of a being that would, a priori, be free in respect to God and would be compelled to always choose to do God's will is a contradiction in terms. As C. S. Lewis states in *The Problem of Pain*, either the creature is free or it is not. To speak of a creature designed in such a way that it is said to be "free" in regard to God and yet compelled to obey God is a statement that is in the same category as claiming God can create a square circle.⁹ The creation of such a being would be tantamount to fabricating a sophisticated android, a machine that would have the appearance of self-determination but without its substance.

In order to be truly free in regard to God, the creature would need at least one critical opportunity to make an independent decision that would express either submission to or rejection of God. That a process was in fact necessary is confirmed by the text itself, which offers a detailed description of the events surrounding the creation of the human race and the actual process needed to actualize its positioning relative to God.

PERFECT OR IMMATURE?

At this point, I need to address an issue that has plagued every thoughtful person who has pondered this text. Were Adam and Eve created “perfect,” as Augustine contended, or were they like immature children, needing the challenge of adversity in order to become fully mature individuals, as Irenaeus surmised?¹⁹

In the former case, we are faced with the inexplicable difficulty inherent to a perfect creature that so foolishly rebels against God. In the latter case, disobedience—i.e., participation in sin—becomes an imperative for the ultimate development of the kind of creature God wishes to create. The latter option presents difficulties that are almost as impossible to overcome as the Augustinian position in that it makes evil a necessary component of God’s project. In other words, the Irenaean position postulates that God could not create the human race without the introduction of evil into history.

The evidence at hand permits a third reading. If indeed the fundamental issue is the realization of a creature that has free will relative to God, then it is perhaps not necessary to speak in terms of a “perfect” or an “immature” creature. The process needed to produce such a creature can perhaps be compared to solving an intricate equation, and as with any equation, a key was needed to resolve it. The ultimate purpose of the exercise required to resolve the free will equation consisted in enabling humanity to discover the full meaning of freedom in regard to God, something that would be done by providing an opportunity for the First Two to make an infinitely critical decision in his regard. A better way to describe the pre-fall creature may not therefore lie in the use of such expressions as perfection or childish immaturity; it may be more accurate to speak in terms of incompleteness. At the moment of its creation, the creature could be said to be incomplete in that it was missing a key element to be fully what God intended it to be.

The creation of a creature that would genuinely be endowed with free will in regard to God represented an endeavor of formidable complexity, for it did not solely depend on God's action. For the process to be complete, an initiative originating from the creature itself was needed. To illustrate what I mean, think of a marriage proposal. In order to successfully complete such a "transaction," the man needs to create an opportunity for the deployment of a critical decision that is made up of two movements: the proposal proper, then the response. Without a response, the process remains incomplete. The solution to the equation that needed to be resolved in order to produce a creature that would be truly free in regard to God is described in the test outlined in Genesis 2:15–17.

Right from the outset, it should be noted that the critical dimension of this test did not reside in the act of eating of the forbidden fruit as such. The refusal to eat it entailed the same outcome. It was rather in the very act of making the decision to eat or not to eat that the equation would be resolved. It was in the participation in an infinitely critical point of decision that the process would be completed. To use an analogy borrowed from computer language, the human response process would represent the final step in enabling Adam and Eve to download "Free Will 1.0."

In the Garden of Eden, humanity was at a completely unique stage of history. The decision Adam and Eve were required to make was theirs alone to make, and it would affect the entire human species.

A POINT OF INFINITE CRITICAL CHOICE

Three texts support the necessity of a point of infinite critical choice: Genesis 2:15–17, 3:1–7, and 3:22.

Genesis 2:15–17 first defines the character of the relationship that is to exist between humanity and God, and then outlines the specific terms of the test that would enable the human species to complete the full implementation of free will.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (NRSV, *passim*)

In typical wisdom fashion, the alternatives are expressed in terms of obedience and disobedience. Each path entails clear and irremediable consequences. Unlike the gods of the ancient Near East who hid their designs from human beings, God explicitly and clearly sets the parameters of the test.

Before we examine the consequences, it is necessary to offer a number of clarifications relative to the text’s literary genre and the terminology that is used. First, while it is rarely noted, this is a text that can best be described as a blessing and curse formula.¹¹ I will comment on the implications of this observation later. Second, this text does not allude, as most translations suggest, to some abstract knowledge of good and evil.

The word “knowledge” is the Hebrew noun *da’at*, which is derived from the verb *yada’*, “to know.” This verb implies more than abstract knowledge. It most often entails the intimate experience of the object.¹² When the text says, “Now the man knew (*yada’*) his wife Eve” (4:1), the implication is that Adam obtained more than just Eve’s phone number! Adam gained a personal and intimate knowledge of Eve. The kind of knowledge the author has in mind in 2:17 is experiential knowledge. Adam and Eve will experience “good and evil.”

The expression “good and evil” (*tov ve ra’*) does not, however, refer to some abstract notion of good and evil, but in context reflects blessing and curse language. The expression should more properly be translated as “the tree of the experience of the blessing and the curse.” God is setting before Adam the path of obedience and the path of disobedience. The first leads to life, the second to death. As to the consequences of disobedience, God is unequivocal. The text uses an emphatic Hebrew form, a Qal infinitive absolute paired to a Qal imperfect, which should be translated, “You will surely die!” “You will surely experience death!”¹³

What is set before Adam and Eve is not a simple prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but a solemn invitation to trust God’s word and to obey his command. If at the moment of critical choice Adam and Eve refrain from eating of the fruit of the tree of the experience of the blessing and the curse, they will enter into the sphere of life. Should they decide to eat of the

fruit, they and the entire human race will be inexorably ushered into the sphere of death.

In accordance with the blessing and curse language, there is no hint whatsoever that the dice are loaded against the First Two. The use of a curse and blessing formula indicates that Adam and Eve are faced with a legitimate choice. At this point, both options are equally possible. There is no suggestion, as is often assumed, that the fall was unavoidable, which would of course imply that evil was a necessary component of God's plan for the human race.¹⁴

It would be wrong to compare this test to some process of attrition similar to leaving chocolate cake in the reach of an unsupervised child who has been ordered not to eat it. The child may resist two minutes, maybe even five, perhaps ten in the case of an exceptionally obedient child. But sooner or later, the child will eat the cake. If this kind of analogy best describes the process Adam and Eve underwent, then the fall was indeed unavoidable.

Though Adam and Eve may have continued to live in the Garden of Eden for some time after they were given the command, the evidence suggests that the First Two were intended to come to an infinite point of critical choice where they would be confronted with the possibility of eating of the forbidden fruit and thus compelled to process consciously their response to God's command. Their decision would determine whether they would experience the blessing or the curse.

A better image to describe the implication of the curse and blessing formula is that of a security door that automatically closes shut behind the person who uses it to exit a building; once over the threshold, there is no going back. Such a metaphor is much more consistent with curse and blessing language generally and is in fact more consistent with the narrative's description of the actual moment of decision in 3:1-7.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not

die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

This text warrants two observations. First, as noted earlier, this passage does indeed describe a point of critical choice during which Adam and Eve are consciously faced with the decision to obey or disobey God’s command. It also gives the reader an insight into the tortuous process through which human free will becomes fully actualized in respect to God.

Second, this passage indicates that Adam and Eve had to be “funneled,” through the agency of the serpent, into the moment of infinite critical choice. The presence of the serpent is important, for without it, it is conceivable that Adam and Eve could have remained in their original condition indefinitely. What we see in Genesis 3:1–7 is the unfolding of the equation required to produce a race that is truly free in regard to God.

The reader may be forgiven for expressing some degree of skepticism at the notion of a decision that would in fact lock Adam and Eve in one sphere or the other. As if the Hebrew writer had somehow anticipated this, he addresses the issue further in Genesis 3:22–24:

Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

This text highlights three elements that clarify the nature and

the significance of the divine test. First, in the act of choosing to disobey God, human beings have undergone a transformation. They are now like God in “knowing good and evil.” This statement implies a movement from one state to another (Gen. 3:4–5). While the text does not precisely articulate the nature of the change, something of momentous significance has happened to Adam and Eve. To return to my earlier analogy, a new program has been installed, or to use the terminology of the text: “Then the eyes of both were opened” (Gen. 3:7). It should be noted that, in and of itself, this change is not intrinsically negative. The descriptive “good and evil” also characterizes the deity: “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:22).

Second, this verse hints at the occurrence of an ontological catastrophe, which is signaled, not so much by the observation that man has become like God, but by the divine prohibition. God forbids Adam and Eve from having access to the tree of life in order to stop this species from living forever in its corrupt condition.

Third, the allusion to the tree of life implies that if Adam and Eve had obeyed God’s command, not only would they have acquired the “knowledge of good and evil” (experienced the blessing and the curse), they would have been transformed into immortal beings.

To summarize then, what these texts describe is not just some undetermined period of time during which Adam and Eve are in compliance with God’s command, followed by the inevitable capitulation to temptation. The portrait we have is of Adam and Eve being funneled into a moment of infinite critical choice that would determine their future and that of the species forever, a one-way door in either direction.

THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE

The Blessing

Genesis 2:15–17 and 3:22 suggest that if Adam and Eve had chosen to obey, a fundamental transformation would have occurred. In as much as the act of disobedience irreversibly locked humanity into the sphere of the curse, it is reasonable to assume that an act of obedience at this critical juncture would have locked humanity into the sphere of the blessing, a level of existence characterized by life, shalom, harmony, prosperity, righteousness, etc. At that point, Adam and Eve would have been given full and

unfettered access to the tree of life, and would have lived as free creatures in partnership with God for all eternity. The implication is unmistakable. Had Adam and Eve chosen the path of life, humanity would never again have had the possibility of entering into the sphere of death.

God never meant for us to die!

The notion that the human race could have been forever locked into the sphere of life is difficult to understand and accept. Part of the reason is linked of course to the fact that we are standing on the imprecatory side of the choice and can only, by necessity, have but a dim view of what the alternative could have looked like. Had the First Two chosen to obey God's command, it is conceivable that I would be writing an article in which I would be speculating on the hypothetical consequences of a primordial act of disobedience. I am sure I would be the target of a never-ending stream of skepticism. A Hitler would be impossible to imagine. War or Slavery? Unimaginable. Gratuitous violence? Impossible. I would be dismissed as fast as yesterday's breakfast.

But this is exactly what the text appears to state. Adam and Eve had a real choice. The curse and blessing formula indicates they could have chosen to obey, usher the human race into the sphere of life, and be transformed by the tree of life into creatures who would never know rebellion, sin, evil, violence, suffering, and death.

The Curse

Adam and Eve chose, however, to disobey, and this act of disobedience tragically locked humanity into a sphere of existence that came to be characterized by death (Gen. 2:17). The text describes the outcome of this act in terms of alienation: (1) from God (Gen. 3:8–10); (2) from other humans and human nature itself (Gen. 3:11–19); and (3) from the natural environment (Gen. 3:11–19). Evil became an intrinsic part of the human DNA. It penetrated to the very heart of our personhood and infected the very core of the fabric of reality itself. The universe itself became structurally infected. It is as if Adam and Eve had released a deadly toxin. Once unleashed, it spread to them first, reached into the core of reality, and spread to the entire universe. In Romans 8:19–23, Paul alludes to the extensiveness of the damage on the universe that occurred at the fall.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

How could such a seemingly innocuous act have such far-reaching consequences on the fabric of reality? While the exact mechanisms must surely remain beyond reason, the creation account offers some hints.

The allusion to the “good” (*tov*), the blessing, in Genesis 2:17, harks back to the divine assessment of creation in chapter 1, where the expression *tov* is used seven times to characterize the world. This word does not simply represent an aesthetic observation. *Tov* in this context refers to the intrinsically good character of the world God has created. It is a statement that qualifies the very core of reality.¹⁵ The use of the same word in the curse and blessing formula is a poke in the reader’s eye. The unusual terminology of this blessing and curse formula connects the “good” of the injunction to the “good” of creation. Conversely, the *ra’* (not evil as abstraction, but more accurately “disaster,” “catastrophe”) denotes the negation of creation.

It is the narrator’s way of signaling that the process God has launched with Adam and Eve is not some mind game. Since God’s initiative is somehow connected to the very fabric of reality, the outcome will structurally affect everything, except of course the very nature of God (the text is not pantheistic). If *tov* refers to the fundamental goodness of the universe, then we must conclude that the alternative *ra’*, “evil,” must denote its opposite (see Gen. 3:8–24).

That should have been the end of it for Adam and Eve, humanity, and God’s project. But it wasn’t. Death has emerged and is spreading, but it does not constitute the last word. Yahweh Elohim¹⁶ is infinitely committed to his project. Though a race he

never intended to bring into being is born, God ensures that history will go on. Does that mean that God simply forgives and forgets, and that everything can go on its merry way? Not quite.

First, because the test to which Adam and Eve were subjected was intrinsically linked to the very fabric of reality, any critical decision in regard to the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” would have structural ramifications on the fabric of reality. The primordial act of disobedience incurred structural damage that corrupted every particle of creation. Second, those who advocate moving away from the use of penal language to describe the atonement need to note the moral and legal ramifications of the event. On the one hand, it represents a violation of a divine injunction. On the other, since the curse and blessing formula belonged to the broader legal framework of the ancient Near Eastern world, it follows that in such a context, disobedience would indeed encompass legal ramifications.¹⁷

The primordial act of human disobedience had radical consequences on human nature and the universe, because at its core it was a moral offense against the ground of all reality: God Himself. One could object to this observation by noting that there was yet no law to violate. But as the apostle Paul observes, Adam’s act of disobedience was in fact the violation of a deeper law.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned—sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come (Rom. 5:12–14).

We can’t overstate the importance of this statement. Once a moral offense is committed, it cannot be ignored or undone. As Miroslav Volf accurately notes in *Exclusion and Embrace*, God does not turn the clock back. He doesn’t erase history.¹⁸ He could, and we would never know the difference, but that would not be reality. It would all become a very intricate mind game, but there can be no mind games with the source of truth and reality. What is, is! To paraphrase Tim Keller, forgiveness always entails a cost.¹⁹ The greater the offense, the greater the cost. When the offense is

infinite, the cost of forgiveness also becomes infinite. Those who demand divine forgiveness without some type of action to meet the demands of justice wish for the impossible.

To summarize then, the primordial rupture was first and foremost moral and legal. It represented a profound and infinite violation of God's will, a challenge to the very ground of justice. Second, it was ontological: The transgression resulted in a radical distortion of human nature. Third, it was cosmic: The offense resulted in a perverse mutation within the very fabric of the universe itself.

THE NECESSITY OF A NEW PROCESS

The Cure

God's primary objective is successfully completed. He has a creature that is genuinely endowed with free will in his regard. But because this great gift has been mediated through disobedience, a new problem has emerged. The creature may have free will, but as C. S. Lewis points out, this was not the creature God had intended to bring into existence.

This condition was transmitted by heredity to all later generations, for it was not simply what biologists call an acquired variation; it was the emergence of a new kind of man—a new species, never made by God, had sinned itself into existence. The change which man had undergone was not parallel to the development of a new organ or a new habit; it was a radical alteration of his constitution, a disturbance of the relation between his component parts, and an internal perversion of one of them. Our present condition, then, is explained by the fact that we are members of a spoiled species. [20](#)

Because the problem was structural and reached into the very fabric of reality, the solution would need to be of the same kind. The cure would need to match and even reach beyond the damage done to the fabric of reality. To clarify, consider the difference between a paper cut and skin cancer. The cure for the first requires no more than a band-aid. The other, however, demands a costly, painful, and intrusive process.

At this juncture, God could have simply brought the whole

process to an end, maybe started again with a new couple. But that never was an option. From all eternity, God was infinitely committed to this project. He would see it through no matter what, for God is love, and perfect love never falters. As C. S. Lewis observes: "Perfect goodness can never debate about the end to be attained, and *perfect wisdom* cannot debate about the means most suited to achieve it."²¹

To go back to my earlier analogy, God is now faced with a new problem to resolve, an equation even more complex than the first. This is a problem for which there was only one solution, a solution necessitated by ultimate reality, and compelled by love, truth, and justice. The solution would require an intervention that would reach into the infinite depths of reality itself.

God the Son would need to become one of us and unjustly suffer many things. He would be rejected and killed, and would be raised from the dead (Mark 8:31). This was the one and only solution to the human predicament. Jesus himself alluded to the absolute nature of those demands when, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked in vain whether there was some other option available to him (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 18:11).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was not the expression of a capricious and vengeful God. It was, on the contrary, an imperative required by ultimate reality. The deeper we reach into the fabric of reality, the more extensive and far-reaching an action will be, and the more demanding and rigid the conditions of that reality will be. In the same way the human creature could only be introduced to free will through a precise process; fallen man could only be redeemed by one and only one process: the incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Christ chose to go to the cross, he did not do so simply to engage in some kind of political critique or to model how we should respond to violence. While these theories may highlight some legitimate aspects of the Christ event, in and of themselves, they fail to take into account the rupture that occurred in the fabric of reality when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and the imperative needed to fix the structural brokenness that was introduced by sin.

EPILOGUE

One more element is needed to resolve the problem created by the primordial act of disobedience. While the cure engineered by

God is available to all (1 John 2:2), just like Adam and Eve had to engage in an infinite moment of critical choice, each human being is faced with his or her own critical decision. Each person is called to make such a choice, for God, like a good surgeon, cannot perform the needed surgery or implement the cure without the patient's consent.

Those who accept God's invitation enter into the sphere of life. The new life begins now and will find full expression into eternity (1 John 5:10–11). Those who do not accept God's invitation cannot be healed. Their nature remains forever broken. For them, an eternity without God, hell being the technical expression for this condition.

God is love. That is why we both rejoice in God's unimaginable love as demonstrated in the greatest act of self-sacrifice ever done, but we also shudder, for perfect love cannot take its object by force. It is for that reason that we also carry the burden of reconciliation. For love to be complete, it must be willingly received.

So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:20–21)

NOTES

1. This paper was originally delivered at the "Mystery of the Cross" study conference held in Kitchener, Ontario, October 27–29, 2011.
2. J. Denny Weaver is one of the better-known Anabaptists to give voice to this view, most forcefully in *The Nonviolent Atonement*, now published in a second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). Readers who wish to explore further this line of reasoning, can consult Eric A. Seibert's controversial proposal to disconnect God from any expression of violence in the Old Testament in his most recent book *Disturbing Divine Behavior* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009). For critiques of Seibert's book, see the relevant articles in *Direction* 40 (Fall 2011).
3. For a succinct treatment of the contemporary terms of the debate, see N.T. Wright, *Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009).
4. For more details, see Gordon Wenham, "Original Sin in Genesis 1–11," *Churchman* 104 (1990): 309–21.

5. Such scholars as Paul Ricoeur (*The Symbolism of Evil* [New York: Harper & Row, 1967]), Claus Westermann (*Genesis 1–11*, tr. by John J. Scullion S.J. [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1974], 275–78), and Walter Brueggemann (*Genesis, Interpretation* [Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1986], 40–54) have reflected at length on this aspect of the text.
6. A remarkable example can be found in Judges 5, where the Hebrew writer records a poem composed to celebrate Israel's victory and the death of Sisera. The song strikingly translates into poetry an event that is presented in the form of a historical narrative in Judges 4.
7. For more details relative to the purpose of this text, see Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 60–63; Jean Bottéro, "Le Dieu de la bible," in *La plus belle histoire de Dieu: Qui est le Dieu de la bible?* (Paris: Seuil, 1997); *Naissance de Dieu: la Bible et l'historien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986). See also Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81–102 and Pierre Gilbert, *Demons, Lies & Shadows* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred, 2008), 45–50, 54.
8. This fundamental purpose is first and foremost grounded in the very nature of God as free. It is hinted at in the description of humanity as being in the image of God (Gen. 1: 27). It is confirmed in God's constant call for men and women to choose and love him attested, for instance, in God's injunction to Adam and Eve to trust him (2:15–17), in the Sinai covenantal exhortations to remain faithful to God, the prophets' call to repent, the Wisdom tradition's repeated and insistent invitations to embrace God, and the New Testament's invitation for all to repent from their sins and turn to God.
9. See C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996 [1940]), 16–27.
10. For a concise presentation of these two positions, see John Hick, "Evil, The Problem of," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vols. 3–4 (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 136–41. For an in-depth study of the Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies, see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).
11. While curse and blessing formulas are expressed in a variety of forms, they typically include a choice whose outcome results in a curse (most often explicit) or a blessing (often implicit). For more details, see Pierre Gilbert, *Le motif imprécatoire chez les prophètes bibliques du 8e siècle A.C. à la lumière du Proche-Orient ancien* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Montréal, 1993) and "The Call to Conversion in the Prophetic Literature of the Eighth Century b.c.," *Direction* 35 (2006): 44–58.
12. Gordon Wenham, *Genesis*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 100–101; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, tr. John J. Scullion S.J. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984 [1974], 288–89.

13. W. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., ed. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1960 [1910]), 342, §113n.
14. Karl Barth is, for instance, representative of those who adamantly state that the fall was unavoidable and even necessary for the unfolding of God's plan for humanity. For a detailed treatment of his position, see R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: 1997), 112–16.
15. As Wenham states, "God is preeminently the one who is good, and his goodness is reflected in his works" (*Genesis 1–15*, 18). See also C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 114.
16. The repeated use of Yahweh Elohim (LORD God) alludes to the relational dimension of God (Yahweh—Exod. 5:22–6:8) and his power (Elohim—Gen. 1:1). For a discussion of the significance of the name Yahweh, see Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design*, 3rd ed. (N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1998 [1981]), 8–11. For Elohim, see Martin Rose, "Names of God in the Old Testament," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1106–107.
17. On the relationship between curse and law, see F. C. Fensham, "Malediction and Benediction in Ancient Near Eastern Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," *ZAW* 74 (1962): 1–91; "Common Trends in Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru-Inscriptions Compared with Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah," *ZAW* 75 (1963): 155–75; D. R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964); K. M. Queen Sutherland, *The Futility Curse in the Old Testament* (unpublished doctoral thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982); B. Gemser, "Motive Clause in Old Testament Law," *VTSup* 1 (1953): 50–66; P. Gilbert, *Le motif imprécatoire*, 110–18.
18. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 121.
19. See Tim Keller, *The Reason for God* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2008), 194–200.
20. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 79.
21. *Ibid.*, 26.

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