

A book based on

*The Grace concealed in Suffering: Developing Virtue  
and Beatitude*

*A Doctoral Thesis defended on March 5, 2020*

*At the Catholic University of America*

## **Section II: Suffering in God's Providential Plan**

# THE OUTLINE

## Section I: Rethinking Suffering

- Suffering as a Detector of Evil
- The Four Tasks of Suffering

## Section II: Suffering in God's Providential Plan

- Addressing the problem of Evil
- Physical Evil
- Natural Evil
- The Evil of Sin
- The Evil of Punishment
- The Theology of Suffering

## Section III: Answering the Call

- The Role of the Church
- The Joy in Suffering
- Messengers of God
- Called to help
- Dying Well
- Finding meaning

## DIVINE PROVIDENCE: GOD'S SAVING PLAN FOR MANKIND

- THE TWO BIGGEST DIFFICULTIES THAT PEOPLE HAVE WITH UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PLAN FOR HUMANITY INVOLVE SUFFERING AND DIVINE ACTION
  - PEOPLE HAVE A HARD TIME RECONCILING SUFFERING WITH THE EXISTENCE OF GOD
  - PEOPLE ALSO HAVE A HARD TIME ACCEPTING GOD'S ACTIVE ROLE IN PEOPLES LIVES (PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE)
    - THEY BELIEVE THAT SCIENCE CAN NOW EXPLAIN THE THINGS ATTRIBUTED TO GOD
    - THEY BELIEVE THAT AN ALL-POWERFUL GOD WOULD HAVE MADE THE UNIVERSE ONCE FOR ALL (CALLED GENERAL PROVIDENCE)
    - SOME BELIEVE THAT A PERSONALLY ACTIVE GOOD WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR EVIL AND THUS TRY TO PROTECT DIVINE MORALITY

## SUFFERING AND EVIL IN GOD'S PLAN

- In the first section, It was shown that Suffering is a beacon of Joy, directing us away from the evil that threatens us and toward God, the font of all that is good
- While this tells us why suffering exists, it does not explain why the underlying evil exists
  - This is the more important question for most people who suffer and is the subject of the second section

## CHAPTER 6: GOD AND EVIL

- The Judeo-Christian Theology begins with the Creation account in 1 Genesis, which tells us God made everything from nothing and it was good.
  - If everything is good, then how can there be evil?
- Evil is the absence, or loss of goodness (as described in Section 1) like darkness is the lack of light
  - This understanding eliminates the problem of evil because evil and Good are not necessarily in opposition
  - The question can thus be restated from
    - “Why would a good God allow evil”, which has led many people to question God
    - to “Why would a good God withhold good from people”
      - There are many reasons that God withholds goods for the benefit of the people

## CHAPTER 7: PHYSICAL EVIL AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH



Correcting and Avoiding Physical Evils Gives Man Purpose and Opportunities to Grow

## MAN AND THE PHYSICAL WORLD



- God willed creation as a gift entrusted to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him (CCC, 209)
- Pope Francis notes that our “dominion” over the universe should be understood in the sense of responsible stewardship (LS, 116)
- Man and his environment are co-dependent:
  - Man depends on the material world for sustenance
  - The material world depends on man for its care and upkeep
- The world is full of resources for man to discover and learn how to use
  - In many cases, the very things that sustain us can imperil us if used improperly

## GOD'S USE OF PHYSICAL EVILS



- God created the physical universe in a way that would provide humans opportunities to complete the work of creation
  - A place where people could learn to share the divine nature
  - The gaps in perfection that people describe as evils are opportunities to grow in virtue, leading to salvation and the beatific vision

- Man's last end is union with God in the beatific vision
- It is not to perfect the existing universe. In fact, it must be imperfect to give humans something to do so we have a sense of purpose.

## MAN AND PHYSICAL EVILS



- Physical evils are gaps in the perfection of a still evolving universe that affect a person's well being through discomfort or fear of safety
- God deliberately places these obstacles in our path to provide us with the challenges we need to grow and the opportunities to mold our environment to meet our needs
- What is initially seen as an evil, is often a failure to recognize potential
  - When people learned to ski, steep snow covered mountains became playgrounds
  - When people learned to surf, large waves were searched for

## THE GREAT LISBON EARTHQUAKE



- On All Saints Day, 1755; Lisbon Portugal was devastated
  - A 8.5-9.0 magnitude earthquake created wide fissures in the streets and collapse many buildings
  - 45 minutes later, a 30 foot tsunami hit the city, causing widespread damage and flooding
  - Followed by 5 days of fire
  - Net: 75,000 died and 90% of the buildings were destroyed
- Major turning point in European history and religion
  - Religious systems supporting unqualified optimism was discredited
  - Many lost faith when people died in churches as the roofs collapsed, so what was gained?

## THE PHYSICAL WORLD PROVIDES US WITH CHOICES



< SOME REACT WITH CHARITY  
SOME TURN TO LOOTING AND  
EXPLOITING THE WEAK >>



In the case of Lisbon, the Earthquake drove the careers of the prime minister Sebastiao de Melo, who was adept at dealing with disaster and his chief engineer (Manuel Maia) who designed the plans for the rebuilding

## THE EARTHQUAKE OF LISBON AS A BASIS FOR THE 4 TASKS OF SUFFERING



The point of the Earthquake of Lisbon was not to improve the career of the prime minister, but that was one of the reasons.

God is attentive to everyone of his creatures, therefore there is a specific reason for every injury or illness incurred

1. Some people develop virtuous habits while dealing with the suffering because they can put God first.
2. When people are faced with suffering they can't ignore, they head to God
3. Big events like this provide copious opportunity to reach out to help
4. Ultimately some begin to do this on their own, and share in the divine goals.

## THE EARTHQUAKE OF LISBON: DEBATES ABOUT PROVIDENCE



The Reaction to the Earthquake of Lisbon was varied

- Voltaire denies any providence could be consistent with the human loss in Lisbon
- Rousseau stayed committed to God's providence, blaming humans for poor building choices and inadequate response to the disaster
- John Wesley saw the Earthquake as a judgment on Lisbon to drive repentance
- Others blamed natural causes directly
- David Fergusson asserts that Lisbon strengthened the hand of the Deists, who maintained that God would not interfere in mundane matters but would let general providence prevail. He claims this is the prevailing rule today

## THE EARTHQUAKE OF LISBON: PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE

Fergusson's view is inconsistent with that of the Church:

- Every soul is important to God
  - Every bit of suffering we endure militates against views that deny the importance of each soul, since God puts forth the effort to show us the goods we lack in each case
- God's general plan is nothing more than the aggregate of all the particular plans
  - God knows all and sees all things simultaneously so that he has tremendous synergy in his plans, one action often influencing many others simultaneously
- In the case of Lisbon, God obviously thought that there were enough souls to be saved to justify the use of physical evils to attain them
  - Trades off temporal safety and comfort for many for eternal bliss for some.

## PROVIDENCE AND CREATION IN NORMAL SITUATIONS

- We are also tested by how we use resources in normal, non-crisis situations
  - Using the world's resources responsibly alleviates suffering, meeting human needs for food, drink, shelter, clothing, medicine, transportation and knowledge
  - Others cause suffering by their selfish hogging of resources, pursuing luxury instead of need and their own interests above the environment and the common good
  - Suffering is a key indicator of the morality of our actions
    - Good actions alleviate suffering while Bad actions cause them

GOD'S GOAL IN PRESENTING MAN WITH AN IMPERFECT ENVIRONMENT IS THE PERFECTION OF MAN, NOT THE PERFECTION OF THE UNIVERSE

- The Universe was built for Man, not man for the universe
- By working together in subduing the environment, we develop the virtues that clear a path for grace to enter our hearts
  - This in turn builds up the kingdom on Earth
  - At the end of time , the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness
    - After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign forever with Christ
    - The universe will then be renewed
- Note: it is man that readies the universe for perfection, but only after the perfection of man through suffering.

: NATURAL EVIL IN A CONTINGENT WORLD



Natural Evils Remind Us of Our Mortality and Drive Us to Desire Heaven over Earth

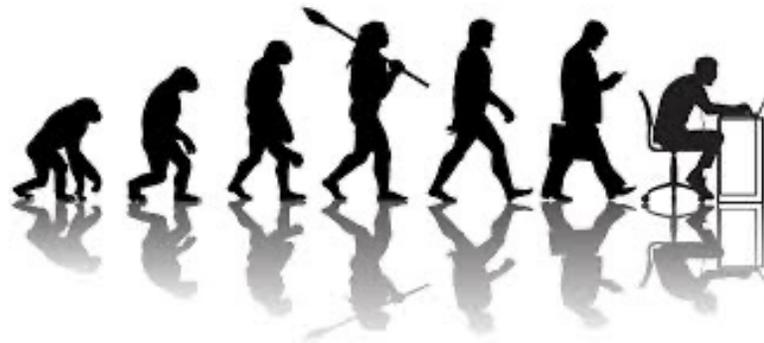
## NATURAL EVIL IN GOD'S PLAN OF PROVIDENCE

- As in the case with physical evil, God uses natural evil to create an environment conducive to redemption but with a different emphasis
  - Provides men with a constant and vivid reminder of their finitude
  - Highlights the lack of good that awaits those that choose to stay separated from God
- It employs the four tasks of suffering to lead humans to beatitude
  - to instill virtue, re-orient the soul to God, release love in humans, and to redeem them.
  - Whereas physical evil emphasizes enhancing comfort and safety,
    - Natural evil emphasizes enhancing health and well being

# LIVING MATTER IN A CONTINGENT WORLD



- Living matter is contingent, finite and recyclable
  - Each time a creature is born or grows, it does so at the expense of something else
  - All living matter is linked through interlocking life cycles and food chains
- With the exception of man, all living things live a temporal existence – man is a composite being w/ eternal spirit



## NATURAL EVIL IN A CONTINGENT WORLD



Natural evils include disease, disability, being prey, and death

- All are necessary in the design of a contingent universe with limited matter and a goal of evolving to perfection.
- Death is required for new life and to allow humans to “graduate” to the afterlife.
- Mankind is ultimate beneficiary:
  - Population is growing at the expense of other life
  - If man misuses resources, future generations will suffer from lack of resources
- **Natural evils remind man of his mortality**



## GOD LOVES DIVERSITY



God brought things into being in order that his goodness might be communicated to creatures and at the same time, represented by them

- because his goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, he produced many and diverse creatures,
- what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another.

- ST I-II Q47.1



## INEQUALITY IS NECESSARY FOR THE PERFECTION OF THE WHOLE

The same divine wisdom that causes things to be different for the sake of the perfection of the universe also causes there to be inequality between them.

Using the example of a house which uses different materials for the roof and the foundation, Thomas demonstrates that inequality is necessary for the perfection of the whole.

*ST I-II Q47.2*



## DISABILITY

- Many people feel that inequality is unfair and inconsistent with a benevolent God
  - This is particularly true when innocent children are born with abnormalities
- St.Thomas insists that “defects and infirmities are directed by Divine providence, to the salvation of men,
  - either of those who suffer, or
  - of others who are admonished by their means
  - – and also to the glory of God” - ST I-II Q87.7
- Birth defects must be considered in two broad categories because the ramifications are very different :
  - lethal
  - non-lethal

## TAY-SACHS: A FATAL CHILDHOOD DISABILITY



- A rare, inherited lipid metabolism disorder which causes too much of a fatty substance to build up in the brain, a process that begins in the womb
- Affected children appear to develop normally for their first six months and then experience progressive loss of mental ability, dementia, blindness, deafness, difficulty swallowing, seizures, and even with the best of care, death before their fifth birthday
- There is no cure

## THE SUFFERING OF A TAY-SACHS CHILD



Tay-Sachs is very challenging because it involves the suffering of innocents

- The child is a martyr of sorts, suffering and dying for the spiritual benefit of another
- Since the child lives and dies in the state of innocent, their path to eternal life, while painful, is fairly clear.
  - They suffer, not for themselves but for those around them

## ADULT APPROACHES TO TAY-SACHS



Many people assume the child is better off dead than to suffer so severely

- They will procure an abortion as soon as they become aware of the diagnosis
  - Others do so to spare themselves of the heart-wrenching experience of watching the child suffer
  - However, those who abort a fetus because it is found to be disabled suffer
    - In a small sample study of 13 cases, almost all the men and women suffered severe depression and 4 of the couples separated

## ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO TAY-SACHS

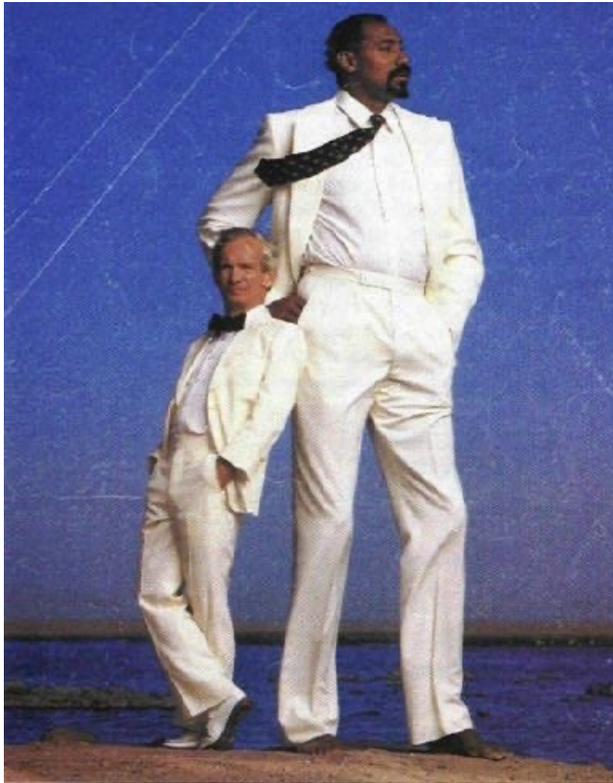
Looked at differently, the parents might see God is teaching them to love profoundly



When they hold and comfort the suffering child, they are taking on part of the child's suffering.

- This suffering is redemptive because the parents suffer for the sake of the child.
- It can also be a catalyst for the conversion of others who witness it.
- The innocent child will be saved, as will the parents who love so well under harsh conditions.
  - The innocent child is actually a martyr of sorts, giving up its life for the chance to save his or her parents' souls

## NON-LETHAL DISABILITIES



Non-Lethal disabilities are part of the human continuum of diversity

- They are evil in that some capability is missing but are truly disabling only relative to specific roles
  - Being short is a disadvantage for basketball players but an advantage for gymnasts and jockeys
  - Every person was made perfect for a specific role, even the most limited person
  - Most people do not suffer from non-lethal disabilities
    - The disabilities do not threaten their existence, they define their existence
    - Disabilities are challenging, but can be overcome with the right expectations
      - People will be satisfied if they fulfil their role in life, even if it seems to be a lesser role than others (more will be expected of those with more capability)

## DIANE DEVRIES: A CASE STUDY OF DISABILITY



- Diane Devries was born in 1950 without legs and with above elbow upper extremity stumps
- Her physician saw her birth as so shocking that he passed out during the delivery
- Her maternal grandmother rejected her as the “devil’s daughter”
- Her parents were loving and supportive, however, giving Diane a positive self-image, understanding her body as compact and streamlined; different, yet intact and healthy

## DIANE DEVRIES: A CASE STUDY OF DISABILITY



- . Despite her lack of limbs, DeVries experienced many of the ordinary events for a woman of her age
    - She was raised at home with her family, went to public school and graduated from UCLA.
    - She had an active social life, got pregnant, was married, and later divorced.
    - As Nancy Eiesland put it, “She has lived an ordinary life in an unconventional body.”
- Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 39.

## THE MENTALLY HANDICAPPED

The disability experience of those with mental handicaps is different and, in many ways, worse than that experienced by those with physical handicaps like DeVries:

1. Because they think and communicate less efficiently than other people, some will find them hard to relate to, resulting in a tendency to dehumanize those with mental handicaps.
2. They are incapable of advocating for themselves, which leaves them vulnerable.
3. Their deficiencies cannot be solved by physical accommodations so in most cases, they require care from others.
4. They do not hide their needs, which makes others uncomfortable, leading to alienation

Nevertheless, Stanley Hauerwas, a theologian and an advocate for the mentally disabled, asserts that “there is no reason to think they would on their own come to understand their condition as ‘retardation’ or that they are in some decisive way suffering.” Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 171.

## SUFFERING AND NON-LETHAL DISABILITY



Although non-Lethal disability does not itself cause suffering, the disabled often suffer discrimination from others, not because of anything they do but because they are different.

Hauerwas points out that those born with Downs Syndrome suffer from inadequate housing, inadequate medical care, inadequate schooling, and a lack of love and care. They will be discriminated against, teased and bullied - Hauerwas, *Suffering Presence*, 172

## SUFFERING AND NON-LETHAL DISABILITY



The situation can be much the same for those with physical defects.

- As she got older, Diane DeVries was also regularly exposed to hostility and prejudicial treatment by people who interpreted her lack of limbs as monstrous.
  - a waitress objected to her sitting at the front of a restaurant because “she will make people sick.”
  - DeVries even was discriminated against by a charismatic Christian church she belonged to, when the pastor refused to let her join the choir because “it just would not look right.” - Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 34-35.

## WHY DOES GOD GIVE SOME PEOPLE DISABILITIES?

There are as many reasons as there are people

- Limits create focus and help people find their true calling
- Limitations force a certain level of humility before God and man and can also teach patience and gratitude toward those that help them.
  - As David Elliot put it, “when one door closes in terms of physical capability, another one opens in terms of moral awareness.”
- There can also be spiritual benefits in being disabled.
  - It can provide the time and aptitude for contemplation
  - To the extent that the disabled recognize and embrace the fact that their condition leads others toward God, their condition can be redemptive.
  - On the other hand, some people with severe mental handicaps remain forever in a state of innocence.

## GOD GIVES SOME PEOPLE DISABILITIES TO BENEFIT OTHERS

- Jesus explains that a certain man was born blind so that works of God might be made visible through him
  - Jesus heals the man, who proceeds to be an effective witness to the Gospel (John 9)



Having a child with a disability can teach a family to love for the right reasons

- Because the child is a child of God entrusted to them for care
  - Hauerwas notes that it can bring the parents together in greater solidarity, force them to recognize the value of suffering, and teach them to take responsibility
- While some discriminate against the disabled, others are drawn to act in charity

## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE PART OF THE HUMAN CONTINUUM OF DIVERSITY



Everyone has liabilities

- Some are just more obvious and onerous than others

The severely disabled have a role to play in society like everyone else  
They are children of God, worthy of love and respect, like everyone else

- Their limitations can provide challenges both for the disabled people and the people trying to help them
  - They also offer an opportunity for moral and spiritual growth for everyone involved
  - Their existence can be considered acts of particular providence.
    - Jesus points out that it is our treatment of the least of our brothers that is the decisive factor in our final judgment. (Matt 25: 31-46)

## INJURIES AND ILLNESS BEYOND BIRTH

# WHAT KILLS US

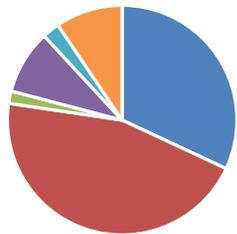
## LOW INCOME ECONOMIES

## HIGH INCOME ECONOMIES

% of people who die: 100%

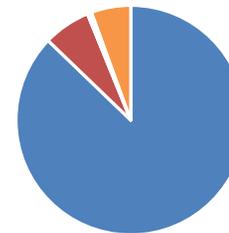
% of people > 70	
Male	Female
18	24

low income



■ noncommunicable ■ infectious ■ maternal  
 ■ neonatal ■ nutritional ■ injuries

high income



■ noncommunicable ■ infectious ■ maternal  
 ■ neonatal ■ nutritional ■ injuries

% of people who die: 100%

% of people > 70	
Male	Female
65	80

Note the significant difference in mortality rates in countries that cannot afford the latest medical treatments

# INJURIES

- Injuries are damages to the body
  - Can be caused by any source of evil (physical, natural, sin or punishment)
  - Will result in suffering if they threaten our existence
- Injuries from natural (living) sources are primarily related to the food chain

- Predators attacking prey or potential prey defending themselves

Suffering due to injuries serve as warnings to ourselves and others to avoid certain situations

- Teaches prudence
- Can unleash love in those who aid the injured
- Can be redemptive in the case where one sacrifices oneself to allow others to escape harm
- Death is always the result of injury or illness so either reminds us of our mortality
  - In the modern world, over 90% of deaths are the result of illness (World Health Organization. Global Health Estimates 2016)



## ILLNESS

- Illness is not random
  - God insures that every illness serves his providential plan for mankind
- There are three basic causes of illness
  - Failure to supply the body with its basic needs
  - Attacks from micro-organisms
  - Degradation of the body itself

# CHRIST THE PHYSICIAN



- Healing was a significant part of Jesus' ministry
  - 17 healing episodes in Matthew's Gospel alone (11 mass healings and 6 specific ones)
  - Healing is how he first got the attention of the people
- Jesus did not heal all the sick
  - Typically he requires faith before he heals
    - Because the purpose of illness is to bring people back to the faith if he healed someone without faith, they would not get the desired benefit.
    - His healings were for a greater purpose than comfort, they were to lead people to eternal life
- Medical professionals should recognize that there is a spiritual dimension to every illness

## SUFFERING FROM MALNUTRITION



- The first problem mankind had to face after the fall was to feed itself (Gn 3:14)
  - Abraham had to travel to Egypt to escape famine
  - In the time of Joseph, the Israelites traveled twice to Egypt to keep from starving
- Spurred on by suffering hunger, humans have developed countless innovations to supply and distribute enough food to meet its collective needs
  - Every hungry person represents an opportunity to practice charity
    - Very few people die of hunger in the industrialized world
    - In low income economies, 3% of deaths are due to malnutrition (WHO)
      - Driven more by political and economic policies than lack of food

## ADDRESSING MALNUTRITION THROUGH THE FOUR TASKS OF SUFFERING

### Love of Self

Hunger drives people to seek food for themselves

Can lead to temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice in dealing with others to find sustenance

### Love of God

Suffering makes one think of the existential questions

Suffering can lead one to seek God

### Love of Neighbor

Suffering provides opportunities to love and be loved;

To help feed those we encounter

### Redemptive Love

One recognizes they suffer for the benefit of others

Can be to accept ones own situation or through active martyrdom like St. Maximillian Kolbe

## INFECTIOUS DISEASES



- For most of human history, people lived in fear of infectious diseases
  - Leprosy was the most feared disease in the Old Testament
  - In the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Black Death killed one third of the European population in just three years
- Infectious diseases are caused by micro-organisms that are part of the “recycling process” that is necessary in a contingent, evolving world
  - They typically do not have lingering effects, they either kill or are killed by a person’s immune system

## THE REASONS FOR INFECTIOUS DISEASES FOLLOW THE FOUR TASKS OF SUFFERING

### **Love of Self**

Sickness drives people to take care of themselves

Can lead to temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice in dealing with others to find relief.

### **Love of God**

Illness makes one think of the existential questions

Suffering can lead one to seek God

### **Love of Neighbor**

Suffering provides opportunities to love and be loved;

To help heal those we encounter and to find cures

### **Redemptive Love**

One recognizes they suffer for the benefit of others

Can be to accept ones own situation or through actively risking disease to help others

# THE BACONIAN PROJECT

- In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Sir Francis Bacon proposed a new goal for Medicine:
  - Not just to heal but to preserve life indefinitely
  - Science could be used for the advancement of learning
  - Cures could be found for all human diseases

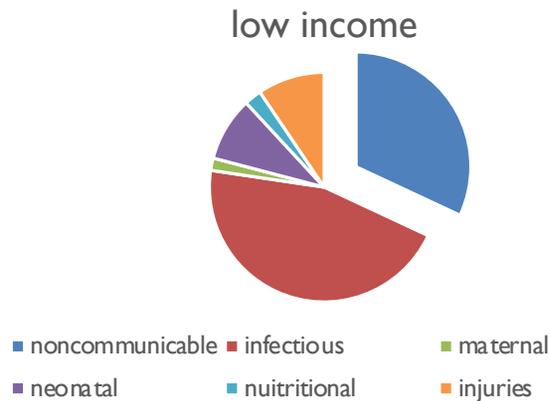
## THE CURE OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE: MANKIND EXERCISING DOMINION OVER CREATION



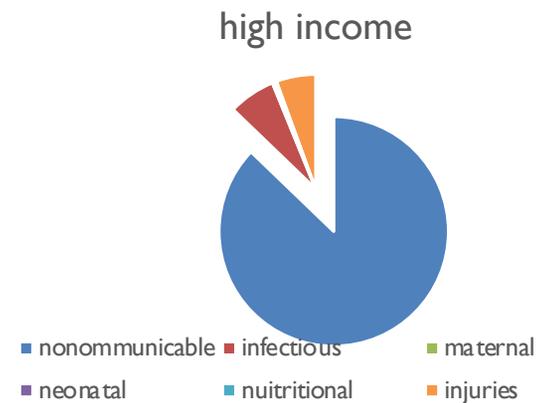
- Over the last 150 years, following the discovery of the principles of vaccination and anti-biotics, man has made impressive progress in fighting infectious diseases
- Effective cures exist for the diseases that were the scourges of the ancient world
  - Small pox, polio, leprosy, measles, mumps, malaria, even, bubonic plague
  - It is now rare for a person to die of an infectious disease in high income economies
    - Covid -19 shows that infectious disease can change this dynamic through mutation
    - In lower income economics, infectious diseases still kill one-third of the people
      - This has seen rapid improvement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as medicines and techniques become available.

IN THE INDUSTRIALIZED WORLD MOST PEOPLE DIE FOR NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES, WHICH ARE THE RESULT OF BODY DEGRADATION

LOW INCOME ECONOMIES



HIGH INCOME ECONOMIES



## NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES: THE FINAL TYPE OF ILLNESS

- Non-communicable diseases, in which the body itself degrades in some way, is the final type of illness
- In the most affluent economies, death by malnutrition, predation, injury and infectious diseases have been greatly reduced.
  - 88% of all deaths are now due to some form of bodily breakdown
  - 65% of males and 80% of females live at least 70 years
  - This level has been stable for 20 years in the richest economies which have access to state of the art healthcare
    - In areas without this level of care, only 37% die of non-communicable diseases and only 18% of males and 24% of females live 70 years.

## WHY OUR BODIES DEGRADE

- Thomas Aquinas takes the position that this type of illness occurs because with the loss of original justice in the Fall, the body is no longer under the control of the soul and becomes disordered ( *ST I-II Q85.5*)
  - It is not clear that medical science has a better explanation
- Bodies degrade in many different ways and at different speeds
  - Some are not life threatening (like diminished eyesight) and can be corrected
  - Others are not life threatening but cannot be cured and are called chronic diseases
  - When critical organs and processes are affected, the disease is terminal

## ILLNESS AS A CATALYST FOR CONVERSION

In **illness** man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations and his Finitude.

Every illness can make us glimpse death

**Illness** can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God

**Illness** can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn to that which is

Very often **illness** provokes a search for God and a return to Him

- CCC 1500-1501

**In Suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ, a special grace**

**- John Paul II, Salvifici doloris, 26**

## NANCY MAIRS: A CASE STUDY



- Nancy Mairs' life as a disabled person began at age 29 when she was diagnosed with MS just after starting Grad school for creative writing
  - She did not adjust well, moving out on her husband and two children, having a series of affairs and ultimately attempting suicide.
  - After a year of depression and roaming, she realized that she was degrading slower than anticipated, rethought her situation and adjusted
- 
- She began to accept her limitations and to write as a "crippled woman" that could live an "ordinary life"
  - She also found God and converted to Catholicism, which led her to accepting her suffering and a need for mercy.
  - "Recognizing and coming to terms with the difficulty that comes with disability, Mairs lives not with the grace of a martyr but with the resolve of someone who realizes that an ordinary life is filled with blessings and curses and that sometimes it is hard to differentiate between the two." Eiesland, *The Disabled God*, 46.



## AN IMPORTANT COMMONALITY BETWEEN DIANE DEVRIES AND NANCY MAIRS



- Both saw themselves as living normal lives
- Despite their hardships and handicaps, they recognized themselves to be within the human continuum of diversity
  - Even when others might attempt to dehumanize them
- This speaks to the insight of Simone Weil, who recognized that social isolation is a key component of suffering.
- It suggests that caregivers can relieve suffering by helping people recognize the “ordinary” things they share with the rest of humanity.
  - Weil, “The Love of God,” 439-441.

## REASONS FOR NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN GOD'S PLAN

### Love of Self

People adapt to their limitations finding other goals and other ways to achieve them. New perspectives can build virtue and eliminate old vices

### Love of God

Illness makes one think of the existential questions  
Suffering can lead one to seek God

### Love of Neighbor

Suffering provides opportunities to love and be loved;  
To help heal those we encounter and to find cures

### Redemptive Love

One recognizes they suffer for the benefit of others  
Can be to accept ones own situation

# DEMENTIA



- Dementia is marked by severe memory loss
  - Affects mostly the very old who have survived everything else
  - >96% of those that die of Dementia are over 70.
  - As medical science has cured other diseases, the percentage of people who die of Dementia has increased
  - Tripled to 7% of all deaths in high income economies since 2000. (WHO)

## DISTURBING CLINICAL BEHAVIOR



Beyond memory loss, the demented often exhibit disturbing clinical behavior that cause concern for caregivers

- repetitive questioning about the same subject
- screaming or yelling for no apparent reason,
- agitation,
- wandering,
- inappropriate sexual behaviors
- destructive or self-destructive behavior, or physical aggressiveness

## DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMERS DISEASE

- There is an active debate involving social scientists and the medical community about whether Alzheimers should be considered a disease or simply what is normal for older populations
- This debate is not denying the existence of the underlying natural processes
  - It calls attention to the deliberate social processes by which professionals redefined dementia as a pathology and placed it within a biomedical jurisdiction.
  - This distinction has important ramifications concerning how the elderly demented are viewed and cared for, particularly regarding reaction to certain behaviors

## DEMENTIA: PATHOLOGY VS NORMAL AGING

- Pathology:
- Assumes that behaviors are caused by disease
- treats behaviors with drugs

- Normal
- Assumes behaviors are attempts to communicate (much like a baby)
- Will attempt to understand needs (hungry, cold, bored, etc)

## DEMENTIA: LOSS OF SELF?

- Memory = Self
- Dementia patients are considered no longer people
- Easy to ignore
- Treat disease with meds/ warehousing

- A Sense of Self exists without memory
- Can repeat habits (bodily memories)
- Always sees things from their own perspective
- But a person's sense of self can be severely damaged if others treat them as a non-entity or as a dementia patient

# DEMENTIA IN GOD'S PLAN

## Love of Self

Allows easing into and acceptance of death.  
New perspectives can build virtue and eliminate old vices

## Love of God

Illness makes one think of the existential questions  
Suffering can lead one to seek God in ways not always understood

## Love of Neighbor

Provides opportunity for others to demonstrate charity

## Redemptive Love

One recognizes they suffer for the benefit of others  
Can be to accept ones own situation

# DEATH



- The existence of death changes everything in regard to suffering and natural evil
- If suffering is differentiated from irritation by the threat to our existence then it is clear that death is a key criteria of suffering (although not the only thing that can cause one to suffer)
- Death is the ultimate punishment for original sin and suffering is the warning given to mankind that it is near, directing us to seek the good we are lacking
- God's punishment is not meant to destroy but to correct
  - Death and suffering both must have positive roles in God's plan

## DEATH IS GOOD (PHILOSOPHY)



- Martha Nussbaum asserts that death is good
- Value, beauty and meaning are all worthwhile because they can be lost and that they are needed to survive
- Death is required to support the evolution of life by providing resources for the birth and growth of new life.

## DEATH IS GOOD (THEOLOGY)



- Death looms, not to end everything , but to give the elect a second chance to live the life God planned for them
- Bodily death, from which man would have been immune if he had not sinned, is the last enemy of man to conquer.
- The four tasks of suffering lead us to conquer death, ultimately leading us to willingly embrace it for the love of God and our suffering neighbors
- Christ turned the curse of death into a blessing because in death, God calls men to himself

## SUFFERING, CONSCIENCE AND THE EVIL OF SIN



Sin Separates Man from God, But God Can Use It to Bring About Good

## SIN: SEPARATION FROM GOD

- Sin is choosing a lesser good over a greater good: a disordered choice
  - It is putting one's own good above the common good, which is God's will
  - God allows it because he respects our autonomy
    - He attaches ramifications to our actions to make them meaningful
      - When we separate ourselves from his goodness, we sense that as suffering
  - God foresees our sins and plans for them
    - This does not mean he condones them or encourages them
      - In the case of Jonah, when he sought to avoid God's plan for him, God made use of his sin to convert the sailors who threw him overboard

## REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING AS THE ANSWER TO SOCIAL SIN

Sin occurs when one person or group oppresses another for their own benefit

This causes the oppressed to suffer

If the oppressed suffers bravely and publicly, it will ignite the consciences of both the oppressors and bystanders.

To show the oppressor the harm that they are doing in a nonjudgmental way is an act of love for one's enemy.

It will often stop the oppression which spiritually benefits the oppressor

Such suffering is redemptive for the oppressed.

It is sharing the suffering of Christ, who also willingly suffered for the benefit of others.

“We will match your capacity to inflict suffering with our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force... We will soon wear you down by our capacity to suffer and in winning our freedom we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process” – *M.L. King, Jr.*

“The law of survival of the fittest is the law for the evolution of the brute, the law of self-sacrifice is the law for the evolution of man”  
- *Mahatma Gandhi, The Essential Gandhi, 79*

# THE DYNAMIC OF OPPRESSION

- The OPPRESSED

- Can only be saved by acting in love toward their oppressors, letting them know in non-threatening ways what they are experiencing

- The OPPRESSORS

- Can only be saved by heeding the suffering of those they oppress

This Binds the two together

- This means that if either fails to love, they both will be condemned
- You must love your enemies

## THE EVIL OF PUNISHMENT REBUILDS GOODNESS



God's Punishment is about Rehabilitation not Retribution

## SUFFERING FROM PUNISHMENT



- Punishment is related to the disturbance of the order by sin and will last as long as the disturbance lasts (Aquinas).
  - It is inflicted by those ruling over the order to preserve the organization.
  - It is meant to discipline its members, not to destroy them
- Punishment has meaning because it creates the possibility of rebuilding goodness in the subject who suffers
- Punishment is also a deterrent for others. If the original sinner takes the effort to warn others from doing the crime, the suffering from punishment would be redemptive
- Punishment is an evil to the punished but is for the greater good of the organization and is just because it protects others

## CHAPTER 11: SUFFERING IN GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PLAN



### **Genesis 1-3: theological, not historical account of creation**

- God created everything from nothing and it was good
- Man was made in the image and likeness of God and given dominion over all of creation
- Man turned away from God to pursue his own interests
- Separated from God, man experiences suffering and death
- God leaves the universe short of perfection (evil is the gaps in perfection) to allow humans to participate in its perfection, giving humanity purpose.
- God provides suffering to highlight the evil and direct humanity to the good
- God provided death to give man a second chance at the life he always wanted for us.

## SEPARATING FROM GOD

- The first humans proved by their choice that they
    - They did not understand the nature of God
    - Did not trust God
    - That they were not like God
- This resulted in their separation from God
- This problem persists to this day
    - Many mistake God's power and knowledge for his nature and pursue transitory goals
    - Others seek to control life and deaths
    - But Some understand that the essence of God is love and therefore can “connect the dots” and recognize that suffering is the tool God often uses to lead men to joy

## PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE

- THE CHURCH ASSERTS THE EXISTENCE OF PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE
  - GOD DOES NOT ABANDON HIS CREATURES BUT SUSTAINS THEM
  - THIS IS SUPPORTED BY LOGIC, HUMAN EXPERIENCE AND SCRIPTURE
  - LOGIC: RATIONAL CREATURES DO THINGS FOR A REASON
    - NO RATIONAL BEING WOULD CREATE A UNIVERSE WITHOUT CARING ABOUT IT
  - “NOT A SPARROW FALLS FROM THE SKY WITHOUT GOD’S KNOWLEDGE (MT 10: 29)”

## GOD GIVES HUMANS THE POWER TO SHARE IN HIS PROVIDENCE - CCC,307

- **307** To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of "subduing" the earth and having dominion over it.
- God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony for their own good and that of their neighbors.
- Though often unconscious collaborators with God's will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers and their sufferings.
- They then fully become "God's fellow workers" and co-workers for his kingdom.

## THE 4 TASKS OF SUFFERING FROM CCC 307

Though often unconscious collaborators with God's will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers and their sufferings. They then fully become "God's fellow workers" and co-workers for his kingdom. - CCC, 307

- *This verse from the Catechism demonstrates the 4 Tasks of suffering*
- 1 ) to develop the cardinal virtues even as they collaborate with God in an unconscious way to subdue the earth in response to their sufferings.
- 2) The second task is for suffering to cause them to experience a change of heart and to re-orient their wills toward God which causes them to enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions and prayers in response to the needs of others.
- 3) This response to the needs of others relates to the third task of suffering which is to release love by providing opportunities to utilize the infused virtues in the service of others.
- 4) Finally, the fourth and final task is fulfilled when they willingly suffer for the sake of others, becoming "God's fellow workers and co-workers for his kingdom."

## HOW GOD MAKES HIS PLAN WORK WITHOUT DISRUPTING HUMAN FREE WILL



God Made us So He knows what motivates us

He is omniscient so he can see all human history at a glance, including when we will sin

He is all powerful so he can arrange for physical evil, natural evil, and the evil of punishment when it is needed to motivate human actions.

Humans act freely according to their nature in the environment God creates, exactly as God foresaw

## THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD

- All people naturally desire to be all they can be
  - It is natural for people to want to be like God and share in his life
  - Most human cultures have myths about humans becoming Gods
  - Eve chose to eat the forbidden fruit because the serpent said it would make her like God
  - The Church teaches that “ the only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods

## MAN'S ROLE IN THE UNIVERSE

- God put humanity in charge of his Creation along with the ability to reason and the freedom to exercise it to complete the task
- This gave humans dignity and purpose and God gave them each other to teach them to love.

They were also given the desire to be like him and with him, but they did not understand that God did this because he desired their companionship

They also failed to recognize that God had their best interests at heart and goaded on by Satan, they chose to try to grasp divinity on their own terms.

Mythologically, this is represented by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil

## SUFFERING IN GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PLAN

### Suffering Provides What Adam and Eve Desired: The Knowledge of Good and Evil

#### Good

- Suffering directs us toward the goods we lack by making the alternatives uncomfortable
- The good is what is aligned to God's will and attaining it leads to joy



#### Evil

- Suffering highlights evil by making it uncomfortable in an unambiguous and unrelenting manner



## JONAH AND THE WHALE: A STORY OF PERSONAL PROVIDENCE

- Jonah was a prophet sent by God to save the Ninevites, the enemies of the Jews
- Jonah did not want to help his enemies so he boarded a ship going in the opposite direction
- God called up a storm to change the environment (using physical evil)
  - It caused the sailors to question who was at fault
  - Jonah admitted his responsibility and tells the sailors to throw him overboard (sin)
  - God caused the storm to stop, causing the sailors to convert (healing)
    - God caused the whale to swallow Jonah (Natural evil) and then to spit him on shore
    - Jonah was asked again to preach repentance to the Ninevites ; this time he agrees
    - Much to his dismay, the Ninevites listened to Jonah and repented at his story
- Note: God's judicious use of evil to bring about good, while still allowing each of the parties to choose (recognizing that there were ramifications if they chose poorly, but they still had a choice)

# THE THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING



**The Theology of Suffering Revolves around One Critical Concept**

# MAN'S LAST END: UNION WITH GOD IN THE BEATIFIC VISION



## The Beatific Vision

Imagine an internet:

- With all that is good and true -> this is to see God.
- With unlimited bandwidth and perfect connectivity
- True Reality vs virtual reality

# THE ROLE OF SUFFERING AND EVIL IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE



## Physical Evil

Gaps in the perfection of the created world to challenge humanity to grow in virtue



## Natural Evil

Competition for resources in evolutionary process among the living reminds us of our mortality



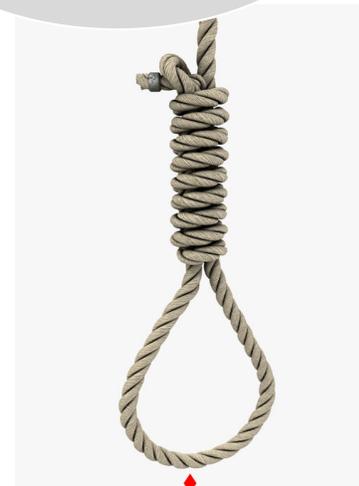
## Evil of Punishment

Goods withheld by others to compensate for losses through sin



## Evil of Sin

Humans abusing free will for gain at the expense of others



Beatific Vision

Suffering is the ability to sense evil and motivates us to pursue the good

# THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE BACONIAN PROJECT

- Man, through the use of Science and Technology, would regain dominion over Creation lost in the Fall of Man
  - Lost paradise would be recovered through technical progress rather than Faith in Christ
  - Improve the Political System
    - Karl Marx introduced Communism and the Russians put it into action
      - Suffering ensued
  - Improve the Human Body to resist suffering and aspire to Societal Ideals
    - Rene Descartes: Separates Soul from Body “the Man in the Machine”
      - Body was treated while soul was neglected
        - Medicalized Death

## COMPETING FORMS OF IMMORTALITY

- Baconian
  - Requires Submission to Medical Science
  - Offers: Indefinite extension of bodily function but without the soul
  - No higher goal
- Christian
  - Requires Submission to Christ and sharing in the divine nature
  - Offers: Immortality of the Soul in an immortal body
  - Happiness in the presence of God (Beatific Vision)

## JOHN SWINTON: THEOLOGY OF GLORY VS THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

- Theology of Glory
- Human Power used to gain victory over death and end suffering
- Death is a “Failure of Medicine”
- To admit that there is no cure is to “give up”
- Both doctors and patients expectations are that if humans use their power well, all will end well

- Theology of the Cross
- Only God can control suffering and death
- Death is inevitable
- All parties must recognize that dying well supersedes meaningless extensions

# MEDICALIZED DEATH

- Allen Verhey asserts that medicalization of Death became triumphant after WWII when advanced technologies, laboratories and pharmacies consolidated into hospitals
  - In 1945: 40% of deaths occurred in hospitals but by 1995 90% of deaths occurred in hospitals
  - When the dying were moved to hospitals, it was not to prepare for death but to be cured
  - Heroic efforts made to save the person's life
    - Died surrounded by medical personnel caring for the body rather than family and clergy attending to their soul
      - Dead and dying organs are replaced by machinery, masking death, and because it is so hard for people to turn off the machines, patients are left in a state defined as non-living matter with no hope of returning to human thriving.
  - Death is rarely discussed in hospitals, which doesn't allow preparation for it

## LISA'S STORY: ONE RAMIFICATION OF GLORIOUS MEDICINE

- Lisa was a young mother with two children and she had been diagnosed with breast Cancer
  - One of her friends gave her the idea of writing stories for her two young children to remember her by
  - She discussed her prognosis with the Doctor and both were confident that she would recover with additional treatment.
    - Lisa put off writing her legacy stories
    - Two weeks latter she was dead

## IN ANSWER TO SUFFERING: PUSHBACK TO MEDICALIZED DEATH

- By the late 1960s, there was considerable pushback from the public on the suffering associated with Medicalized death.
  - People started demanding that their loved ones be allowed to die a natural death
  - The medical community responds:
    - All decisions of health treatment deferred to Client
      - Patients given autonomy to make their own decisions regarding death

## 4 CHOICES FOR DYING: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS

- Fight it all the way
- **Medicalized Death**
- Try every alternative until you die

- Embrace it
- **Hospice**
- Stop all treatment except palliative care (pain relief)
- Focus energy on getting affairs in order/  
reconciling with God and society

- Sedate it
- **Terminal Sedation**
- Sedate the person without ANH, will be dead within 2 weeks

- Control it
- **Physician Assisted Suicide** (where legal)
- Person defines when/where they die