

The Spiritual Theology of Julian of Norwich
as a Resource for Issues
in Theoretical and Pastoral Theodicy

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich in light of certain developments in contemporary theodicy. It begins by exploring in a creative and critical fashion the current debates between theoretical and practical (or pastoral) theodicy. Some theologians who favor pastoral responses to evil and suffering argue that theoretical theodicy is mistaken, misguided and even immoral because it legitimizes and perpetuates evil in the world, silences the voices of victims, and justifies the social structures that produce suffering. In critically exploring these claims, I argue that these views of pastoral theodicy and the responses from those who support theoretical theodicy trigger three significant issues for contemporary theodicy: (1) the question of theoretical support for practical theodicy; (2) the nature and actions of God in relation to human suffering; and (3) the question of destructive suffering experienced by people.

This thesis then focuses on Julian of Norwich's (1342-1416) spiritual theology and its implications and relevance to these contemporary issues in theodicy. Although writing centuries before the formal development of the

theological discipline of theodicy, Julian's spiritual theology is delivered with a rich theoretical context that provides motivation for responding in practical ways to evil and suffering in the world. Julian's themes of divine compassion and the images of the motherhood of God contribute positively to the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. Julian's approach also responds to the question of the destructive suffering of people through placing her emphasis on the passion of Christ and proposing eschatological hope. This thesis thus argues that Julian's peculiar way of integrating themes of theoretical and practical theodicy in her spiritual theology provides positive, constructive implications for these contemporary issues of theodicy.

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Introduction

1. Background and Context

This thesis explores how certain themes in the spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich positively impact significant issues in contemporary theodicy. To begin, I describe contemporary treatments of theodicy, especially focusing on key features of practical or pastoral theodicy, its critique of theoretical theodicy, and a defense of theoretical theodicy. This introductory framework will clarify the significant issues associated with contemporary theodicy before developing an in-depth thesis statement that relates these issues in a constructive way to the spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich.

In many of the contemporary treatments of theodicy, a new emphasis or distinction occurs, as theologians distinguish between “theoretical” and “practical” (or “pastoral”) theodicy. While all traditional theodicies can be considered “theoretical” because of their attempts to achieve formulaic-theological reconciliations of God and evil, a “practical” theodicy is largely concerned with how a person can cope and find meaning in the face of suffering and how that person can alleviate or resist suffering through either individual or collective action. We see that within a secular, post-modern context, the debate is now moving more in the direction of the moral, existential, and social impact of evil than toward the philosophical and theological origins of evil.

Many critics of theoretical theodicy who favor the pastoral response to evil and suffering base their arguments on the notion that theodicy must deal with the particularity of human evil and maintain positive social effects for victims of

extreme suffering. Theoretical theodicy, they argue, cannot resolve the problem of evil and suffering by merely applying rational principles that defend God. These produce nothing but detached theoretical speculations. Moreover, they argue that theoretical theodicy is mistaken, irrelevant, and even immoral because it [they believe] legitimizes and perpetuates evil in the world, silences the voices of victims, and justifies social structures that produce suffering. Theoretical theodicy does not bring healing and a deeper love of God. It thus should be abandoned or subverted. These criticisms of theoretical theodicy by pastoral theodicians and the responses from those who support theoretical theodicy have produced three significant issues in the ongoing debate and discussion of contemporary theodicy.

The first issue relates to the actual theoretical context for practical theodicy. As mentioned earlier, the critics of theoretical theodicy, such as Kenneth Surin, Terrence Tilley, Sarah Pinnock, and John Swinton, argue that theoretical theodicy should be abandoned or subverted. However, in the contemporary theodical debate, some theologians, such as David O'Connor, Barry Whitney, Marilyn McCord Adams, and Michael Stoeber, do defend theoretical theodicy and argue that theologians who favor abandoning theoretical theodicy do not provide sufficient evidence to show theoretical theodicy to be immoral, irrelevant, and a tacit sanctioner of evil. Rather, for them, theoretical theodicy is necessary because it fulfills the defensive role for practical theodicy by expressing a cognitive dimension that can effectively generate consolation that is equally a practical response to evil and suffering in the world. Defenders of theoretical theodicy also argue that certain effective themes found in theoretical theodicy are required to support pastoral concerns properly. For example, an after-life belief allows one to

hope for eventual healing and recovery from the effects of destructive suffering that overwhelms a person in this life. The defenders of theoretical theodicy argue that theoretical theodicy can provide the motivation necessary for a very practical response to evil and suffering in the world. Thus, this question of the theoretical contexts that affect pastoral concerns is a major issue in contemporary theodicy.

A second issue pertains to the question of the actual nature of God as it relates to human suffering. Critics of pastoral theodicy argue that theoretical theodicy is irrelevant to the particular context of human suffering and does not bring healing and a deeper love of God. This criticism questions the true nature of God, especially in relation to human suffering. Many responses to this question have focused on the theological and practical meaning of the compassion of God because the meaning of compassion is grasped as a possibility for healing and hope. Wendy Farley and Stoeber, who emphasize the theological significance of the compassionate love of God in special relation to human suffering, are persuasive examples of this response. They find the true nature of God in God's active compassion when responding to human suffering. Nevertheless, the meaning of God's active compassion needs to be clarified further through the exploration of the debate on the passibility of God and of God's compassion revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. Many theologians reconstruct Christology in order to show that it represents God's compassionate response to human suffering, while others argue that God cannot suffer. However, the important point here is that the nature of God in responding to human suffering is a significant issue that needs to be addressed in contemporary theodicy.

A third issue for contemporary theodicy is the question of the destructive suffering often experienced by people. Destructive suffering is suffering that apparently contributes nothing to the personal or spiritual development of the victim and even hinders it. Some critics argue that theoretical theodicy is immoral because it neglects the victims of destructive suffering by trying only to explain the logical systematization of God and evil. One response to this criticism is Christological. Theologians like Adams and Simone Weil defend and build particular accounts of Christology as effective theological responses to destructive suffering. They argue that the cross of Jesus Christ has a spiritual consolatory power for people who are undergoing destructive suffering. The cross of Jesus provides potential healing power for victims of affliction, in the experience of divine consolation and presence, when one is able to identify one's own anguish with the suffering Jesus experienced or experience mystically the Spirit of Christ. Another theological response to destructive suffering is eschatological. John Hick and Stoeber similarly insist that afterlife speculation suggests that goodness will eventually prevail over evil, opportunities for redemption will continue, and divine love will be defended in the face of evil despite the harsh human reality of destructive suffering.

This thesis argues that the spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) might provide a helpful resource for all three major issues raised in contemporary theodicy, even though Julian was not familiar with the modern technical distinctions between its practical and theoretical components, and was writing some three hundred years before the formal development of the discipline of theodicy itself. Julian, usually referred to as "Lady Julian" or "Dame Julian,"

was an anchoress of Norwich, England, well known for the sixteen “showings” or revelations of God’s love which she received while suffering a near-death illness.¹ Julian’s book, *Showings*, has two versions, known as the Short Text and the Long Text. The Short Text, which was written soon after Julian’s revelations, “largely restricts itself to a narration of the contents of each version.” The Long Text, which was written more than twenty years after the visions, “adds a good deal more commentary and theological reflection, and is obviously the result of much pondering.”² The *Showings* is not simply a description of her personal mystical experience. It is, as Joan Nuth contends, an “example of theology as reflection on the experience of faith, revealing how the insights born of contemplation can overflow into doctrinal teaching.”³ As a form of careful theological inquiry, Julian’s *Showings* includes “many questions about the nature of God, about creation and humankind, about sin, and about the ultimate meaning and fulfillment

¹ The word, “anchoress” is defined as “a type of nun, or laywoman, who lives in a small enclosure, never going out, and never abandoning her commitment to prayer for those who live around her.” See Brant Pelphrey, *Christ Our Mother: Julian of Norwich* (Willmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989), 17. Julian was as an anchoress in a cell attached to St. Julian’s church in Norwich and dedicated her entire life to prayer, worship, and deep contemplation of the Mysteries of God, especially focusing on the accounts of her visions and their meaning. For further study of the life of this anchoress, refer to Chapter 3 “The Life of an Anchoress” in Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York/Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2000): 28-50.

² Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 3.

³ Joan M. Nuth, *God’s Lovers In An Age of Anxiety: The Medieval English Mystics*, Tradition of Christian Spirituality, ed. Philip Sheldrake (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 100.

of all things, or eschatology.”⁴ During her vision, Julian pondered the problem of sin and suffering and asked God about both. She was told that “all shall be well” and was deeply consoled. As Julian matured, she was not satisfied with simple emotional comforting; she wanted to understand, through the use of reason, how the notion of a loving God could be reconciled with human suffering. So she was posing and exploring questions of modern theodicy, centuries before theodicy as a theological field was formally refined. Essentially and existentially, Julian struggled with the questions of theodicy. Julian’s peculiar integration of mystical experience into her theological reflections and, as a result, her specific themes of spiritual theology lead us to a comparative dialogue on the significant issues found in modern theodicy.

2. Thesis Statement

This thesis explores Julian of Norwich’s contributions to the current ongoing debate between theoretical and pastoral theodicy. The three significant issues in contemporary theodicy mentioned above closely relate to themes found in Julian of Norwich’s spiritual theology. One issue—the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering—is closely connected to Julian’s themes of (1) the Fall, sin, and human nature, (2) images of God and divine compassion, and (3) the nature of the body and evil. The issue concerning the question of destructive suffering in people is related to Julian’s themes of (4) of the suffering of God and

⁴ Philip Sheldrake, “A Practical Theology of The Trinity: Julian of Norwich,” in *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and The Doctrine of God* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 101.

of people and (5) afterlife beliefs and theodicy. The issue concerned with the question of theoretical context for pastoral theodicy closely connects to Julian's treatment of (6) theoretical, speculative theology and pastoral concerns.

3. Methodology and Procedure

The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate Julian's positive implications for these major issues in contemporary theodicy. Thus, the methodology will involve textual exposition of the spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich and philosophical and hermeneutical analysis of themes found in her spiritual theology that relate to issues in contemporary theodicy, with special attention to their pastoral implications.

Chapter I explores practical or pastoral theodicy and its critique of theoretical theodicy. First, the main responses to the problem of evil in contemporary theoretical theodicy are explored and then analyzed for the criticisms of theoretical theodicy raised by practical theodicians. These fall into three areas of concern: Theoretical distortions and misconceptions, neglect of human suffering, and the immorality of theodicy. Secondly, the thesis examines Dorothee Soelle's theology of suffering, focusing on her book, *Suffering*, which has been the groundwork for many subsequent practical/pastoral theodicians. The arguments of theological critics who make a sharp distinction between theoretical and practical theodicy are also explored by focusing on the work of Surin. Lastly, this chapter explores the different kinds of contemporary practical/pastoral responses offered to address the problem of evil and suffering, clarifying certain similarities revealed in their arguments.

Chapter II of the thesis develops the significant issues of contemporary theodicy by exploring the responses of theoretical theodicians to the criticisms made by pastoral theodicians. First, regarding the thought of O'Connor, Adams, Whitney, and Stoeber, the paper clarifies the problematic implications of abandoning theoretical theodicy. These discussions suggest that certain compelling theoretical contexts are required to support pastoral concerns, the first major issue. Second is the issue of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. Chapter II clarifies the meaning of compassion and God's active compassion when responding to suffering and evil through an exploration of the question of a suffering of God. In reference especially to God's compassion as revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ, this chapter argues that co-suffering is the main characteristic of divine compassion in relation to human suffering, and that this compassion provides consolation to the sufferer and brings healing and stimulates a deeper love of God. Last is the issue of the destructive suffering of people. Here the definition and nature of destructive suffering are clarified, and the socio-political dimension of destructive suffering is further explored by a clarification of the nature of the body and evil and the related notion of *han* in Korean theology, the unresolved suffering and hopelessness of the oppressed, as a socio-political dimension of destructive suffering. Further, the relevance of the theological responses of Adams, Weil, Hick, and Stoeber in responding to this issue of destructive suffering is closely examined.

Chapter III explores some of Julian's major themes within the context of these major issues: The notion of the Fall, sin, and human nature; the images of God and divine compassion; and the nature of the body and evil. First, Julian's

notions of the Fall, sin and human nature pertain to the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. Julian presents a unique approach to the problem of evil that contrasts considerably with Medieval, orthodox retributive theodicy. Secondly, the discussion explores Julian's theology of the motherhood of God and her stress on divine compassion as a vital response to the fundamental theological problem of theodicy. Here, the meaning of Julian's image of Christ as mother is examined closely, including Julian's many sacramental aspects of this radical image of self-giving. At the same time, the thesis explores her inclusion of both a maternal and a paternal image of God, and also explores the question of divine power. Based on an analysis of the recent debate concerning the suffering of God, the discussion explores the positive implications of Julian's approach to this debate to clarify her spiritual theology of divine compassion and devotion to the suffering of the crucified Christ. Lastly, this chapter examines Julian's constructive view of the nature of the body and evil, which is significantly different from the classical/medieval worldview on that issue. In this section, we offer that Julian can inform contemporary society about the goodness and holiness of the body and sensual knowing in relating to God and responding to suffering and evil.

Chapter IV examines the positive implications and suggestions of Julian's spiritual theology in response to the issue raised regarding the destructive suffering of people and the problem of abandoning theodicy. First, the text explores how Julian's theology of suffering could have a positive effect on the problem of affliction and *han*. The thesis argues that Julian's theology of suffering, which is very sensitive to the human experience of affliction, is grounded in her emphasis on the passion of Jesus and divine compassion. Thus, her approach provides a

possible hopeful response to the problem of affliction and *han*. Secondly, the paper illuminates Julian's eschatological dimension that can provide afflicted people with the hope and the possibility of healing; thus, Julian's approach does reveal a possibly hopeful response to the problem of destructive suffering. The third concerns Julian's positive implications for the contemporary theodical problem regarding abandoning theoretical theodicy. Here the paper discloses that Julian's spiritual theology provides a rich theoretical context that clarifies the motivation she felt, namely, that such was necessary to support one's response in pastoral ways to evil and suffering in the world. This chapter concludes by examining how Julian integrates the two dimensions of practical and theoretical theodicy creatively and effectively.

4. Significance of the Thesis

My thesis explores Julian's spiritual theology and its implications and relevance to contemporary issues between theoretical and pastoral theodicy. The theological significance here is the clear exposition and analysis of the ongoing debate and discussion between theoretical and pastoral contemporary theodicy and how that examination clarifies important theodical issues. The thesis contributes positively to the current scholarly work being done in the area of theodicy. It explores how certain themes from Julian's spiritual theology offer positive contributions to contemporary theodical issues, including the integration of theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy. It argues that strong theoretical contexts are necessary for a pastoral theodicy. Further, Julian's theme of divine love, the most prominent theological theme in her spiritual theology, provides theological

and pastoral significance when responding to the contemporary question of the nature of God, as it relates human suffering. Finally, this thesis shows how Julian's spiritual theology provides positive contributions to the contemporary theodical discussion on destructive suffering, through her precise focus on creative Christological and eschatological approaches to address that issue.

Chapter I

Practical Theodicy and Its Critique of Theoretical Theodicy

This chapter focuses on the exploration of practical or pastoral theodicy and its critique of theoretical theodicy. In the first section I outline the main responses to the problem of evil in contemporary theoretical theodicy and then summarize the criticisms of theoretical theodicy raised by practical theodicians, distinguishing three categories of concerns: theoretical distortions and misconceptions, the neglect of human suffering, and the immorality of theodicy. Given the main focus in this chapter on practical theodicy, I postpone developing the major responses to these criticisms until chapter 2. The second section of chapter 1 explores the background to the contemporary development of the distinction and debate between theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy. I first explore Dorothee Soelle's theology of suffering, focusing on her book, *Suffering*, which has provided the groundwork for many subsequent practical/pastoral theodicians, who criticize the nature and structure of traditional theodicy. I also explore the arguments of other theological critics who make a sharp distinction between theoretical and practical theodicy, focusing on the work of Kenneth Surin, who triggers directly and accelerates the contemporary debate and discussions between the two kinds of theodicy. In the last section, I explore various kinds of contemporary practical/pastoral responses to the problem of evil and suffering, focusing on the thought of Sarah Pinnock, Wendy Farley, John Swinton, and Jürgen Moltmann, and clarifying some similarities revealed in their arguments.

1. The Criticisms of Theoretical Theodicy Raised by Pastoral Theodicians

1. A. Traditional Theoretical Theodicy

Today theodicy is the given name for the entire subject encompassing the problem of evil and its attempted resolution. Theodicy broadly considered is the effort to comprehend the occurrence and the existence of evil within one's larger theological framework which describes what one believes about God and the world. However, the word theodicy is a word comprising two Greek terms: θεός (God) and δίκη (justice). From this term, one can define theodicy briefly as the defense of the justice of God in the face of evil. The term theodicy was coined at the beginning of the eighteenth century by philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) in his work, *Theodicy*.⁵ So the term itself, which was invented by a philosopher, alludes that theodicy is a basically philosophical enterprise. Theodicy consists of the vindication of God from culpability for the existence of evil in the world. Namely, it justifies the ways of God to humanity, representing through complicated analysis why God is not responsible for the evil and suffering of the world.

John Hick emphasizes that theodicy also responds to the problem of pain and suffering in human experience. Hick says, "An implicit theodicy is at work in the Bible, at least in the sense of an effective reconciliation of profound faith in

⁵ At the beginning of the eighteenth century G.W. Leibniz transliterated two Greek terms (θεός, God and δίκη, justice) into the French word théodicée (German: Theodizee) in his book: *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil). I refer to the contemporary English translated version, G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, E. M. Huggard (tr.) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

God with a deep involvement in the realities of sin and suffering.”⁶ Hick defines theodicy as “an attempt to reconcile the unlimited goodness of an all-powerful God with the reality of evil.”⁷ From this definition, Hick stresses that the unlimited goodness of God should be consistent with the reality and experience of evil.⁸ In sum, Nick Trakakis suggests that “a theodicy aims to vindicate the justice or goodness of God in the face of the evil found in the world, and this it attempts to do by offering a reasonable explanation as to why God allows evil to abound in his creation.”⁹

Traditional theodicy wrestles with the logical “trilemma”: (a) God is good; (b) God is omnipotent; (c) Evil exists. Through intricate computation, it seeks to affirm divine goodness and omnipotence in the face of evil. These reflections, often undertaken by philosophers and philosophical theologians, try to prove the compatibility between God and evil. Tyron Inbody says, “In the strict sense of the term, theodicy is primarily a logical problem, a problem of how to hold apparently contradictory propositions simultaneously without contradiction.”¹⁰ Thus it can be

⁶ John Hick. *Evil and the God of Love* (New York & Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). 243.

⁷ John Hick, “The Problem of Evil” in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 736.

⁸ Michael Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics’ God: Towards a Mystical Theodicy* (Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 9.

⁹ Nick Trakakis, “The Evidential Problem of Evil” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (March 31, 2005). Retrieved January 16, 2012 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evi/#H4>.

¹⁰ Tyron Inbody, *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 30.

said that traditional theodicy is fundamentally defensive. Theodocists defend religious beliefs against the arguments that they are contradictory or implausible in the face of evil. The fact that “the theodocist usually responds to attacks pertaining to evil that are raised against religious beliefs by the atheologian or religious sceptic,” as Michael Stoeber contends, “has led many to perceive theodicy as an exclusively defensive activity.”¹¹

Although Stoeber admits that the defensive role of theodicy is necessary to an effective theodicy, he argues that a positive or affirmative aspect of theodicy, which indicates the nature and extent of divine goodness in the response to evil, needs to be addressed for a more satisfactory and effective theodicy.¹² Stoeber understands and defines theodicy as “the vindication of the beneficent care of God in the context of the existence of evil.”¹³ On the basis of this definition of theodicy, he suggests, “An effective theodicy will involve the reconciliation of the divine attributes and evil - what can be understood as its defensive aspect. But it will also include evidence illustrating the active beneficence of the Divine, while at the same time maintaining the negative reality of evil and the obligations of social morality.”¹⁴

In responding to the reality of evil, theodocists have proposed and explored various themes. The major themes, which I will briefly outline here, are the topics

¹¹ Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics' God*, 9.

¹² Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics' God*, 11.

¹³ Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics' God*, 14.

¹⁴ Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics' God*, 14.

of free will, aesthetics, punishment, teleology, eschatology, mystery, and process theodicy. It is crucial to understand generally these various themes in theoretical theodicy in order to fully appreciate the criticisms raised against theoretical theodicy by practical theodacists, which I will explore below in section 1b.

Free Will Theme: In this view, suffering and evil are thought to arise at least in part from the free actions of human beings, where freedom is treated as a great good that justifies the negative effects of evil actions. The free will theme is drawn upon especially as a response to the problem of moral evil, where moral evil is thought to arise from the misuse of human free will. The claim is made that the majority of pain and suffering is caused by humans who freely choose against the will of God. Accordingly, “Where sin is understood as the consequence of the free choice of human beings this free will defense is perhaps the most significant theodical theme.”¹⁵

Punishment/Retributive Theme: The topic of free will is often closely connected with the theme of punishment, insofar as it is deemed an appropriate response to human misdeeds. In this theme, which has been very significant in Judeo-Christian theodicy, suffering is connected with the retributive justice of God that is directed against our sin and guilt. This theme emphasizes both individual sin and the concept of original sin, which arises in the interpretation of the myth of the fall of Adam and Eve. Due to their disobedience to God’s commands they are degraded and pass this original depravity on to their descendants. In response to this original misdeed, natural evil—the evils associated with the natural

¹⁵ Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics’ God*, 15.

environment quite apart from moral evil—is introduced to this world. Moral evil is caused directly by individual sin and physical or natural evil is God’s just punishment for this moral evil. Evil and suffering are considered either as the consequence of human sin, or as divine retributive punishment for sin.¹⁶ Defenders of the punishment/retributive theme argue that punishment is not simply “an expression of anger or vengeance of God” but “an act of requital demanded by a good and just God to balance out or set right a past wrong. It is a matter of justice.”¹⁷

Aesthetic Theme: The aesthetic theme affirms that seen in its totality from the infinite standpoint of the Creator, the universe is wholly good. The aesthetic solution claims that the good in the whole is amplified by contrast with the evil in the parts. The whole is better than the evil in the parts, which actually contributes positively to the aesthetic ideal. The beauty of the ideal justifies those negative parts.¹⁸ All suffering and evil in every form and proportion is both necessary and good in terms of God’s point of view. Even the most negative features contribute to

¹⁶ Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics’ God*, 14.

¹⁷ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 59. For a discussion of suffering as judgment in the biblical and theological tradition, see S. Paul Schilling, *God and Human Anguish* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), chap. 6. “Suffering as judgment”; See also Barry Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), chap. 3. “Contemporary Biblical Theodicy.”

¹⁸ Arthur Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 114.

the aesthetic cosmic harmony.¹⁹ Evil in this view is considered just an aspect of our narrow and limited human perspective.

Teleological Theme: The aesthetic solution would have to show in what way a future good justifies a present evil.²⁰ It is thus often related to the topic of teleology. In the teleological theme human beings are regarded as incomplete and in need of improvement and growth. Evil is a necessary condition or a consequence of necessary conditions in a world where obstacles and struggles are necessary in order to develop morally and spiritually. Stoeber says, in teleological themes, evil “is considered a necessary component in the movement or transformation of present circumstances to some future, better, state of affairs.”²¹ This theme points out that God often allows human suffering for their own maturing and perfecting. Namely, human suffering is part of education for our growth and development. Hick is perhaps the most famous advocate of this kind of theodicy in contemporary theology. Hick’s theodicy is called a “soul-making” theodicy because he believes God’s purpose in creation is the positive shifting of all human creatures away from egoic self-centeredness towards God consciousness. Rejecting the notion of an actual, historical “fall” from a pristine state of moral goodness, Hick instead chooses the notion of a necessary fall, where human beings move from a condition of moral ignorance and innocence to that of moral and spiritual maturity. Hick prefers to think of moral evil as a predictable result of the creation of free human

¹⁹ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 42.

²⁰ Herman, *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, 116.

²¹ Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystics’ God*, 12.

beings. Human beings were originally created as spiritually immature rather than morally good creatures, which they are to become through various life-experiences in freedom.²² Considering Hick's notions of divine love and of omnipotent power and various afterlife possibilities, suffering and evil in this world are "justified because they will result in the fulfillment of the purpose of God in the eschaton. God will use all that happens within this environment ultimately to bring all creatures to the full vision and love of God."²³

Eschatological Theme: The teleological theme is often linked to eschatology. This theme tends to argue that evil and suffering are limited to a finite time in human history and will end in an afterlife context. Furthermore, this theme claims that evil and suffering will finally somehow be explained and justified in the ultimate fulfillment of God's intention for us. Hick argues that "This afterlife redemption is understood not as compensation for evil and suffering, but rather as a fulfillment, a bringing to fruition the spiritual perfection of human beings."²⁴ Hick's view is that the soul-making will continue in an afterlife context beyond this earthly life, securing a ever-deepening relationship with God and a final overcoming of suffering and evil, which is the ultimate fulfillment God intended for the creature.²⁵

²² See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 219-235.

²³ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 62.

²⁴ Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?* 26.

²⁵ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 340.

Mystery Theme: Sometimes this eschatological reconciliation remains shrouded in mystery, where it is suggested that God has God's own reasons for causing or permitting evil. Finite beings are in no position to know what God's reasons are or to judge them, even if there will be the perfect reason to explain the harsh realities of suffering and evil. In such views, the reason in the divine mystery surpasses human knowing.²⁶ This solution is to assert that the problem of evil must be seen as a mystery and challenge to human faith.

Process Theme: This theme tends to downplay traditional conceptions of divine power, suggesting that God is unable to prevent the evils arising either in human beings or in the processes of nature. Process theists insist that traditional theists have had a confused and untenable belief about the meaning and definition of the term "God," and also about what it means to be a creature.²⁷ Process writers distinguish between what they perceive to be the God of coercive power in traditional theism and a God who acts solely persuasively, the latter being a far more viable belief. They argue that dismantling the theodicy problem will require the theist to espouse a conception of divine power which does not entail that God is in total control of the course of history, and which allows a substantial degree of freedom to exist for all organisms. So the problem of evil is to be dismantled by denying the traditional concept of omnipotence.

²⁶ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 64.

²⁷ Whitney, *What Are They Saying About Good and Evil?* 47.

1. B. Criticisms of Theoretical Theodicy: Theoretical Distortions and Misconceptions

These various themes of theoretical theodicy have come under criticism by some contemporary theologians who tend to advocate a turn to practical or pastoral theodicy. Surin, in his book *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, argues that when the canonical form of the theodicy-problem began to obtain its crucial formulation, the God of theodicy had been the God of the philosophers.²⁸ Surin argues that the “project” of theodicy is essentially a work of solitary reflection:

Theodicy is a philosophical and/or theological exercise involving a justification of the righteousness of God. This justification requires the theodocist to reconcile the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect divinity with the existence and the considerable scale of evil. Theodicy is thus a way of gathering knowledge, of justifying claims to knowledge. The theodocist’s fundamental interest is in cognition, the kind of clear-headed epistemological activity that can be undertaken by the solitary contemplative subject.²⁹

For Surin, theoretical theodicy is an essentially contemplative epistemological activity that has a highly abstract and thoroughly discursive nature.³⁰ Within this understanding of the canonical form of theodicy, Surin identifies three main reasons why attempts to formulate a viable theodicy are failed. The first reason can be found in the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, situated morality and religious faith in a mechanistic, desacralized universe. The thinkers of the Enlightenment shifted the burden of the problem of evil from God

²⁸ Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 3.

²⁹ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 1, 21.

³⁰ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 24

to humanity. The intellectual drive of the Enlightenment was to secularize this problem, to transform theodicy into “anthropodicy.”³¹ The intellectual agenda for the theodicy was “a consequence of the penetration of social and cultural phenomena by the irrevocable and irreversible process of rationalization sponsored by Enlightenment thought.”³² Swinton similarly argues that within the cultural mood of the Enlightenment, God was replaced by an increasingly anthropocentric understanding of salvation through human progress. Accordingly, the problem of evil appears to be one of the problems that humans strive to solve through reason and intellect. God becomes a being who is “clearly rational and orderly and whose ways are fully comprehensible and accessible through reason and logic.”³³

Surin argues that a second reason for the failure of theoretical theodicy is found in the abstract conception of evil. He writes, “to regard theodicy as a purely theoretical and scholarly exercise is to provide a tacit sanction of the myriad evils that exist on this planet.”³⁴ The development of an abstract, depersonalized conception of evil is the unavoidable implication of theoretical theodicy. It seems to be in the very nature of theodicy to have implications that are purely theoretical.³⁵ Within such a context, Surin argues, a theoretical theodicy is

³¹ Kenneth Surin, “Theodicy?” *Harvard Theological Review* 76:2 (1983): 227-28.

³² Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 44.

³³ John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Response to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 32-33.

³⁴ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 50.

³⁵ Surin, “Theodicy?” 230.

irrelevant to and does not support the alleviation of the causes of suffering. The third reason for the failure of theoretical theodicy for Surin is that it involves only the mere application of rational principles. He contends that even though the problem of evil and suffering is basically mysterious in its innermost depths and thus confounds the human mind, the goal of theoretical theodicy is to make it comprehensible, explicable. Theoretical theodicists thus take the place of Job's comforters, who seek to exculpate God by rationalizing the afflictions of their friend.³⁶ For Tilley, a theoretical theodicy is a discourse practice which is "impractical." About this, Tilley criticizes,

[Theoretical] theodicies do not respond to complaints or laments. They are not addressed to people who sin and suffer. They are addressed to abstract individual intellects which have purely theoretical problems of understanding evil. Given the intellectual context, the purpose of constructing a theodicy seems purely theoretical. But in their interminable pursuit of theory, theodicists devalue the practical issues.³⁷

Also defining theodicy as a discourse that promotes the rational plausibility of theism, whether in a defensive or explanatory mode, Pinnock, like Surin and Tilley, makes the argument that coping with suffering within a faith context does not require a theoretical reconciliation of God and evil at all, but only a practical response centered on solidarity with those who suffer in the world.³⁸ For Pinnock,

³⁶ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 52-53.

³⁷ Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 229.

³⁸ Sarah Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust* (Albany, NY: SUNI Press, 2002), 11, 131.

theoretical theodicies only produce detached theoretical speculations, which are epistemologically incongruous.

1. C. Criticisms of Theoretical Theodicy: The Neglect of Human Suffering

Critics of theoretical theodicy generally recognize that when we frame a set of ideas in terms of the abstracted formulations, we commit the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness.”³⁹ So Frank Mauldin argues that when applying this fallacy of misplaced concreteness to the theoretical approach to the problem of evil and suffering, one fails “to connect their conceptual expression with the concrete matrix of Christian theism.”⁴⁰ Instead, Mauldin argues that the abstractness of traditional theodicy must be replaced by the concrete reality of the Triune God in self-revelation in redemptive history. For him, redemption, as the source of Christian experience and understanding, must be “the key-category for Christian theists in their statement and evaluation of the theoretical problem of evil.”⁴¹ The problem of evil and suffering must deal with “the crucified God, the concrete God who actually suffers eternally and historically and who transforms existing individuals in the life-world.”⁴² Mauldin thus argues that the concrete concept of

³⁹ See Frank L. Mauldin, “Misplaced Concreteness in the Problem of Evil,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 11 no 3 (Fall 1984): 244-46.

⁴⁰ Mauldin, “Misplaced Concreteness in the Problem of Evil,” 246.

⁴¹ Mauldin, “Misplaced Concreteness in the Problem of Evil,” 247.

⁴² Mauldin, “Misplaced Concreteness in the Problem of Evil,” 254.

the Trinity - especially, God as suffering with us, for us, and in us - not only shatters the abstractions of the traditional problem but also provides a different address to the problem of evil.⁴³

For critics of theoretical theodicy, the problem of evil is fundamentally existential in its origin, application, and solution. Evil is met by an existing individual within the larger structures of his or her lived situation. Surin argues that for theodicy to make a difference, it must address specific evils suffered by specific individuals in specific circumstances. Surin makes an appeal for an end to philosophical speculation and a new beginning for the praxis of faith: “theodicy, then, has to engage with the sheer particularity, the radical contingency, of human evil.”⁴⁴ Critics of theoretical theodicy claim theodicy work must be determined by the reality and nature of suffering and its experiences in specific life situations. Soelle argues that theology has to be concerned with the realities of this world. Soelle contends that theology originates in pain, and its “locus is suffering or the disregard for life that we experience all the time.”⁴⁵ For Soelle, the experience of powerlessness is essential to the nature of suffering. Powerlessness accompanied by meaninglessness brings about a situation of alienation. Suffering that alienates can be named affliction, which consists of physical, psychological, and social elements. This crucial criticism led Soelle to a radical Christ-centered theology

⁴³ Mauldin, “Misplaced Concreteness in the Problem of Evil,” 248.

⁴⁴ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 52.

⁴⁵ Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward A Christian Feminist Identity*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 90.

which emphasized solidarity with those who are powerless.⁴⁶ Moltmann similarly contends that theology must be the response to the God-question as it is raised in the face of suffering. For Moltmann, the problem of suffering, as Soelle contends, directly concerns Christian praxis in solidarity with those who suffer.⁴⁷

The reason why Soelle and Moltmann emphasize Christian praxis in solidarity with the sufferer is that theodicies tend to have the wrong kind of relationship with particular evils. Critics of theoretical theodicy generally criticize the abstract discussion of evil as a generality, and the way it thereby allows us to avert our gaze from particular evils. Arguing that theodicy has to engage with the particularity of human evil and acknowledge the significance of the victims of extreme suffering, Surin claims that a theoretical theodicy overlooks the radical particularity of human evil, namely its implicated social and political praxis. Such an approach, which favors a totally abstract conception of evil, cannot be mediated, and is “a social and political praxis which averts its gaze from all the cruelties that exist in the world.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Viewed from Soelle’s argument, we come to recognize that Soelle’s theology is a feminist liberation theology that emphasizes a praxis-reflection-praxis process because of its origin in suffering. See Dorothee Soelle, *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, International, 1990), 71. For her, the only possible answer to suffering is “the abolition of circumstances under which people are forced to suffer.” See Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, translated by Everett R. Kalin (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1975), 2.

⁴⁷ Lucien Richard, *What are They Saying about the Theology of Suffering?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 43.

⁴⁸ Surin, “Theodicy?” 232.

Furthermore, suggesting that theoretical theodicy lacks any positive social effect when it comes to the victims of extreme suffering, Surin argues that the ‘praxis-oriented’ theodicy alone contributes to the alleviation of the suffering because it “locates the ‘problem of evil’ in the ‘space’ occupied by victims, and invariably discusses it with a quite different context of narrative construction in mind.”⁴⁹ As a specific example of extreme suffering, Stanley Hauerwas in his *Naming the Silence* points to the diseases and dying of children that are the most troublesome experience of the reality of evil and the most bewildering challenge for the conception of God. Particularly looking at the problem of childhood illness and death, Hauerwas argues that scholarly speculation does little to comfort a soul actually experiencing the reality of radical suffering, and furthermore it is a mistake to try to “solve” the problem of evil.⁵⁰

In the light of their reflections on radical suffering, critics of theoretical theodicy argue that not only the traditional endeavor of theodicy is pointless—it “does not bring healing and a deeper love for God”—but it is also “a potential

⁴⁹ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 145.

⁵⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silence: God, Medicine and the Problem of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990). 65. Illustrating the suffering story about a child, named Carol Wanderhope who died with leukemia, Hauerwas argues that the traditional ways of solving the problem of evil and suffering are totally mistaken and their explanations are not working and meaningless. Hauerwas says, “Even if one assumes rather physicalist accounts of the inheritance of “original sin,” it still does not follow that Carol Wanderhope “deserved” leukemia; nor does it comfort us to believe that leukemia is the result of humankind’s sinfulness and thus denotes the general disruption of God’s good order. That may be, and it may help explain our general disorder, but it does nothing to explain the particularity of Carol Wanderhope’s illness.” See Hauerwas, *Naming the Silence*, 73-74.

source of evil in and of itself.”⁵¹ They claim that when we try to make explanations that defend the goodness of God in the face of radical suffering, we develop theology that is problematic and pastorally dangerous.

1. D. Criticisms of Theoretical Theodicy: The Immorality of Theodicy

Some critics of theoretical theodicy tend to claim it is immoral—that it legitimizes evil in the world, silence the voices of victims, and justifies the social structures that produce suffering by seeking to apply general and universal explanations of suffering and evil to situations that are profoundly unique and particular. These criticisms are inspired by and connected to Soelle’s conceptions of God of theoretical theodicy, as either a sadistic or an apathetic God, who is free from the suffering from the world.⁵² Such images of God, Soelle contends, leads one to disregard the various causes of suffering, and concentrate chiefly on the personal meaning of suffering, and neglects the other’s suffering.⁵³ This criticism of Soelle provides a theological foundation for the insight of practically-oriented theodicians who criticize the immorality of theoretical theodicy.

Surin harshly charges that theoretical theodicy provides a “tacit sanction of the myriad of evils that exist on this planet.”⁵⁴ For Surin, this immorality of

⁵¹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 13.

⁵² I will extensively explore in the next section of this chapter Soelle’s conceptions of Christian masochism, sadism, and an apathetic God.

⁵³ Soelle, *Suffering*, 17.

⁵⁴ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 50.

theodicy occurs primarily as theodicians do not recognize or pay attention to the social effect in their project of theodicy. In line with Surin, Tilley also criticizes that it draws our attention away from the reality of concrete suffering and the action we can take. It legitimizes evil in the world. Therefore, theodicy is itself evil, and furthermore creates evils.⁵⁵ In this sense, theodicy work is immoral. For Tilley, the most obvious negative effects of theoretical theodicies are that they limit moral evil to individual acts and ignore evil practices and structures.⁵⁶

Indicating that the image of Auschwitz represents a radical break in historical consciousness and philosophical methodology responding to evil and suffering, Pinnock insists, “theodicy is exposed as perpetrating amoral justification of evil and rationalistic caricatures of practical faith struggles,”⁵⁷ especially, in the light of the context of the holocaust and post-holocaust theology. Pinnock reveals that camp victims were not inclined to accept theodicy that could logically reconcile God’s goodness with the evil experienced in the camps.⁵⁸ In terms of Pinnock, it is not morally insensitive for victims to respond to suffering by reflecting on its religious meaning. However, to impose meaning and reasons on the suffering of others such as camp victims is a moral scandal because it tends

⁵⁵ Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 3 & Ch 9 “The Evils of Theodicy.”

⁵⁶ Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy*, 241.

⁵⁷ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, Preface, xi.

⁵⁸ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 137.

illicitly to impart the responsibility on the actual victims.⁵⁹ In this way, Pinnock further argues, “theodicy effaces the testimonies of victims of the Holocaust and other historical catastrophes. It also sanctions the suffering of others, adopting the perspective of a dispassionate bystander.”⁶⁰ For Pinnock, this signifies the immorality of theodicy.

To sum up this section, critics that I mentioned above generally concur that theoretical theodicy tends to distort and neglect traditional faith responses to evil, to downplay human suffering in its focus on the defense of God, and is morally harmful in the sense that it often works to silence the testimonies and voices of those who are actually suffering, but also undermines protest and concrete action from others in and through its explanation, and therefore legitimizes suffering and evil by ignoring social dimensions. As we will see below in the next chapter, these criticisms raised against theoretical theodicy have come under serious question as scholars have moved to defend theoretical theodicy in substantial ways. However, they have also led to the development of a specifically pastoral or practical theodicy, which is the subject of the next section.

⁵⁹ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 140. In line with this argument of Pinnock, Stanley Hauerwas similarly argues that “it is crucial for us to recognize that while it is perfectly appropriate for us to discover the suffering we experience in illness to have a telos in our service to one another in faith, it is not appropriate for us to try to force that account on another. When we do that we can force pointless suffering and pain into a teleological pattern that cannot help but be destructive. If we try to attribute these terrible results to God’s secret providence, that cannot help but make God at best a tyrant and at worst a cosmic torturer.” See Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silence*, 89.

⁶⁰ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 138.

2. The Rise of Pastoral/Practical Theodicy

2. A. The Groundwork for the Rise of Practical Theodicy

Soelle's book, *Suffering*, has provided the groundwork for many subsequent theologies that distinguish between theoretical and practical responses to evil and suffering, even though her book does not overtly make the distinction between the two. It is fully implied in her book. The book, *Suffering*, is very effective in compelling us to face some of the most vivid expressions of human suffering in our time of twentieth-century. The book proceeds at a practical level; it has almost nothing to say about the rational permissibility of religious belief within a suffering world. This is clarified through Soelle's basic tenet of her theological methodology. For her, faith and theology has to be concerned with the realities of this world. She clearly affirms that theology must be "a reflective description of certain experiences."⁶¹ An effective theology cannot proceed deductively from well-established theological principles but must follow inductively from human experiences. Her theology is marked by her own personal experiences and situations, from the holocaust, to the evils of capitalism, the genocide of Vietnam, and the ramifications of sexism. Thus, theology, for Soelle, will be determined in its process and scope by the reality and nature of suffering.

For Soelle, suffering has physical, psychological and social dimensions. Her work on the theme of suffering is valuable due to its solid argument in special support of the social dimension of suffering. We can easily notice that Soelle's

⁶¹ Dorothee Soelle, *Christ the Representative: An Essay in Theology After the "death of God,"* trans. David Lewis (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 91.

theological work on the problem of suffering is different from traditional approaches to theodicy. Rather than providing theoretical, philosophical, and systematic analysis on the problem of suffering, she investigates the practical dimensions of human suffering, focusing on revealing the causes and dynamics of suffering and asking for concrete action responding to such suffering within the particular personal and social context.

This is also clearly shown and elaborately developed in chapter 3 of her book, *Suffering*. Soelle speaks of three phases of reaction to suffering. The first stage is a phase of mute helplessness in which the sufferer feels isolated and powerless.⁶² The second is the stage of lament, of articulation, the stage of psalms. By giving voice to lament one can begin to deal with his or her suffering within the framework of emotional-spiritual expression. In this stage the suffering is explored carefully and taken seriously, questioning how we might organize to overcome suffering: “the expression of suffering solidifies people instead of turning them in upon themselves.”⁶³ Through this stage of communication by lament the isolated suffering leads to solidarity in which change occurs. Soelle considers the second stage as “an indispensable step on the way to the third stage, in which liberation and help for the unfortunate can be organized.”⁶⁴ Finally, in the third and last stage, one

⁶² About this initial phase of pain, Soelle specifically describes: “The weight of unbearable suffering makes us feel totally helpless; we are stripped of the autonomy to think, speak, and act. We are completely controlled by the situation, and our scarcely formulated lament is more like the cry of an animal.” See Soelle, *Suffering*, 69-70.

⁶³ Soelle, *Suffering*, 73.

⁶⁴ Soelle, *Suffering*, 74.

protests, organizes in solidarity with others, and seeks to change the structural context that leads to such suffering. Soelle is clearly thinking primarily of situations of social injustice. At this point, she treats her subject as a dimension of political or liberation-theology. Her response to suffering is different from most traditional theodicy, by searching for social and political causes and implications of evil, which arise from her specific survey of human context of extreme suffering.

Soelle lays severe charges against certain themes of theoretical theodicy, creatively developing the critical subjects of Christian masochism, sadism, and apathy. Traditionally in the Christian tradition, God has been understood both as the almighty/omnipotent being and as loving and just being. Soelle argues that the logical result of such a formulation traditionally has led the believer to conclude that all suffering comes from God and so must serve to either punish or test human beings.⁶⁵ Such a conclusion leads to the two fundamental tendencies of Christian masochism:

One is the vindication of divine power through human powerlessness. Affliction is regarded as human weakness that serves to demonstrate divine strength. Sickness and suffering are used for a religious purpose.... Corresponding to this tendency is the other, on the human side, to push for a willingness to suffer, which is called for as a universal Christian attitude.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Soelle, *Suffering*, 20

⁶⁶ Soelle, *Suffering*, 17. Fundamental to the nature of suffering for Soelle is the experience of powerlessness. Powerlessness signifies “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks.” Powerlessness is accompanied by meaninglessness. Both of these elements bring about a situation of alienation. Suffering that alienates can be named affliction. Affliction is suffering that has at the same time physical, psychological, and social elements. It is the social element that is at the core of affliction. See Soelle, *Suffering*, 11.

Soelle argues that Christian masochism is reflected in the view because God is all-powerful; God is the final source of all suffering. So all suffering is to be patiently accepted as either a divine punishment or a divine testing, and accordingly we should submit to it and be purified by our sufferings. She likewise inveighs against the counterpart of theological masochism in Christian sadism. The basic sadistic understanding of suffering consists of three propositions: “(1) God is the almighty ruler of the world, and sends all suffering; (2) God acts justly, not capriciously; (3) all suffering is punishment for sin.”⁶⁷ The worst aspect of such a sadistic understanding of suffering is a theology of God that makes the wrath of God its essential aspect. Such an emphasis on God’s anger also leads to an emphasis on human depravity. Ultimately, theoretical theodicies that have promoted Christian masochism and sadism result in “worshipping the executioner.”⁶⁸

Soelle contends that all theoretical systematic formulations which represent or imply the characteristics of Christian masochism and sadism fail. This failure is also connected to what she identifies as “apathy” toward suffering. In terms of Soelle, apathy is a form of the inability to feel pain. It has the double aspect: “denial and repression of one’s own suffering and icy indifference to the suffering of others.”⁶⁹ Apathy is the opposite of love, love being the ability to be affectionately affected. Socially, apathy is understood as a condition in which people are so dominated by the goal of avoiding suffering that such a goal leads to

⁶⁷ Soelle, *Suffering*, 24.

⁶⁸ Soelle, *Suffering*, 28.

⁶⁹ Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak*, 25.

the avoidance of human relationship and contacts altogether.⁷⁰ Culturally, apathy is the most negative aspect of an individualistic culture. It affects people primarily in industrial nations and is a prime result of consumerism. Thus, Soelle says, “Apathy, an absence of suffering, and the desire to go through life without experiencing pain are all hallmarks of the culture dominant in the First World.”⁷¹ This apathetic ideal is related to conceptions of God in the Christian tradition. The apathetic God, Soelle argues, cannot lead us to an authentic understanding of suffering. In this image of God, human suffering is considered as human weakness that serves to display divine strength.⁷² Such an attitude fails to consider the various causes of suffering and neglects the other’s suffering by chiefly concentrating in the acceptance and transformation of personal suffering.

In contrast to Christian masochism, sadism, and apathy, Soelle focuses on the suffering of Christ on the cross. It is through the paradoxical death of Jesus on the cross that human beings are able to identify with Christ and establish solidarity with all those who suffer in the world.⁷³ Concentrating on the cross of Christ as an answer to the problem of suffering, Soelle says,

In the light of Auschwitz the assumption of the omnipotence of God seemed – and still seems!- to me be a heresy, a misunderstanding of what God means. From this criticism of the theistic-patriarchal God I developed a position in which the cross of Christ stands in the centre, as an affirmation

⁷⁰ Soelle, *Suffering*, 36.

⁷¹ Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak*, 24.

⁷² Soelle, *Suffering*, 17.

⁷³ Soelle, *Suffering*, 164.

of the non-violent impotence of love in which God himself is no longer one who imposes suffering, but a fellow sufferer.⁷⁴

For Soelle, the God of Jesus Christ is a compassionate God who has the ability to feel the other's pain. The cross remains the symbol of love that refuses to betray its very nature: its concern for the welfare of the other. The cross is the symbol of God's compassionate love. Compassion somehow allows us to suffer with the other; it demands solidarity with the other. Such a response to suffering stands in strong contrast with the apathy produced by the systematization of suffering.

It is the compassionate nature of love that leads Soelle to a mystical understanding of suffering. For her, mysticism is the opposite of repression in all of its forms. A true acceptance of reality implies a deeper love for reality. Accordingly, she says, "Every acceptance of suffering is an acceptance of that which exists."⁷⁵ The denial of every form of suffering can result in a flight from reality. Such an acceptance of reality can supersede theodicy. The theodicy question is superseded by an unlimited love for reality. In this context, "God is the symbol for our unending capacity to love....Here the theme is love toward God, toward one who certainly is not over us like a perfect being but one who is in the process of becoming, as is everything we love."⁷⁶ This love of God can be stronger than every form of affliction, in a way stronger than God. "Mystical theology answers suffering with a love in view of which the 'Lord' has to feel ashamed for it

⁷⁴ Soelle, *Thinking About God: An Introduction to Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, International, 1990), 187-188.

⁷⁵ Soelle, *Suffering*, 88.

⁷⁶ Soelle, *Suffering*, 92.

is stronger than he. But “the Lord” is no longer the object of this theology...[such unconditional love] transcends every God who is less than love.”⁷⁷

Soelle’s approach to the problem of suffering exemplifies her condemnation of themes of theodicy that lead to theological masochism, sadism, and apathy and proposes practical responses to help to reduce human suffering. Her theology of suffering is a cornerstone for many contemporary authors, including h Surin, Tilley, Grace M. Jantzen, Farley, and Pinnock. They more explicitly criticize theoretical theodicy and expand on many of Soelle’s basic ideas in clarifying a “practical theodicy.”

2. B. The Division between Theoretical and Practical Theodicy

Surin in his book *Theology and the Problem of Evil* approaches the problem of evil from the principle that the essence of God is revealed on the cross of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, which is in contradiction with the theoretical theodicy’s traditional theistic conception of God. For theoretical theodicy, the ways of God are comprehensible and accessible through reason and logic. Surin, however, argues that theoretical theodicy, as an essentially abstract and discursive task, cannot be the answer to the problem of evil and suffering.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Soelle, *Suffering*, 94.

⁷⁸ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 24.

In response to the concerns Surin raises for theoretical theodicy,⁷⁹ he advocates a practical response to suffering that is motivated by a theology of the cross and solidarity with those who suffer in the world. Surin understands that God's action to bring salvation to humankind is only through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The focus of the answer to the problem of evil is God's revelation of himself on the cross of Christ. The self-revelation of God on the cross of Christ is the self-justification of God. He says, "Theodicy waits on God's revelation of himself in the event of the cross of Christ."⁸⁰ According to Surin, this is the only approach to the problem of evil that can do justice to the spiritual predicament of evils in the world. He contends that especially from the perspective of those who are suffering in an absence of God has led us to adopt a *theologia crucis* as the way to deal with this problem.⁸¹

Considering theodicy as "a form of second-order theological discourse facilitating a first-order praxis," Surin argues that the answer to the problem of evil lies in praxis and should be intended to overcome the cruelty and perversion that exist in the midst of our lives.⁸² Following the theologies of the cross of Soelle and Moltmann especially, Surin believes that the suffering of the God of love is

⁷⁹ Surin's approach criticizes what he claims to be the four types of theodicies with a theoretical emphasis: the free will defense, the 'natural law' theodicy, process theodicy, and the 'soul-making' theodicy. About his criticisms over the four types of theodicies, see chapter 3 of his book, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 70-105.

⁸⁰ Surin, "Theodicy?" 244.

⁸¹ Surin, "Theodicy?" 246.

⁸² Surin, "Theodicy?" 246.

revealed through the crucifixion of Christ and experienced by those who suffer from evil. People are encouraged to become like Christ—One who shows the suffering love of God—and thus accomplish the practical task of overcoming evil through their Christ-like commitment to, presence in, and solidarity with, the victim of evil.

Surin indicates that theoretical and practical methods are each aspects of theodicy that can be distinguished from one another in and through the questions that each asks when approaching and responding to the problem of evil. The theoretical aspect of theodicy is mainly concerned with answering the questions: “Can evil in itself be rendered intelligible?” “Is the existence of God logically compatible with the existence of evil?” The practical aspect of theodicy concerns itself with the questions: “What does God do to overcome the evil and suffering that exist in creation?” “What do we do to overcome evil and suffering?”⁸³ In line with the argument of Surin, Pinnock similarly distinguishes between theoretical and practical theodicy, revealing four issues of various strategic responses to evil and suffering:

The first two issues are “theoretical” ones concerning: (1) the explanation of the origin of evil, as a cosmological or anthropological question and (2) the justification of suffering, exposing God’s reasons for allowing suffering. In contrast, evil and suffering also raise difficult “practical” issues, namely: (3) how a person can cope and even find meaning in the face of suffering and (4) how to alleviate or resist suffering by means of individual or collective action. The dominant academic approaches to evil and suffering primarily address theoretical issues of explanation and justification.⁸⁴

⁸³ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 59-60.

⁸⁴ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 2.

With Surin's distinction between theoretical and practical theodicy, many contemporary philosophical and theological writers of theodicy in their various writings contributed to the debate and discussion concerning the differences between theoretical and practical approaches to the problems of evil and suffering.⁸⁵ The problem of evil is not restricted to the logical or evidential problems of evil related to reconciling ideas of God to it, but is augmented by responses to the practical problems of evil, such as how people can and do continue to love and trust God in the face of horrendous suffering.

3. Contemporary Pastoral/Practical Theodicy

3. A. Practical Response to Suffering

In this section I will focus on the thought of Pinnock and Farley as practical responses to suffering. Both advocate practical responses to sufferings rather than theoretical, traditional responses to suffering. While Pinnock focuses her work on post-Holocaust Jewish and Christian thinkers who reject theodicy, Farley focuses her work on radical suffering which is dysteleological or gratuitous suffering, and on Divine compassion which empowers people to actively resist evil and suffering.

Pinnock, in her book *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust*, focuses on continental existential and political Jewish and Christian writers, all of whom advocate practical responses to sufferings rather than seeking to explain or justify God's reasons for causing or permitting suffering

⁸⁵ Anastasia Foyle, "Review of Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil," *Ars Disputandi* [<http://www.ArsDisputandi.org>] 6 (2006), paragraph 1.

in theodicies. Having the theological position that practical approaches to theodicy are preferable to theoretical ones, Pinnock focuses on Jewish thinkers Martin Buber and Ernst Bloch and Christian thinkers Gabriel Marcel and Johann Baptist Metz to present two diverse rejections of theodicy, together with the analysis of some of the main responses to the Holocaust from both the existential and the political perspectives.

Marcel focuses chiefly on private suffering and tries to emphasize the ability of individuals to accommodate their suffering in their self-understanding and interpret it creatively. However, Marcel's interpretation of suffering by the individual does not mean that the trial is sent by God, nor does it provide reasons for the occurrence of suffering. The goal is empathy and meaning in our lives; not to prevent suffering or protest.⁸⁶ In terms of Pinnock, Marcel's approach to suffering, which is rooted in a white, Western, middle-class setting, is barely able to approach more complex situations of suffering such as the Holocaust.⁸⁷

Accordingly, Pinnock criticizes Marcel's model for responding to suffering that does not grasp situations in which the dehumanization of the victim does not allow for "postures of availability and hope, which enable meaning-making."⁸⁸ Pinnock suggests that this practical approach to suffering is appropriate in some situations of an individual's suffering, but not satisfactory to engage in larger social demonstrations of suffering.

⁸⁶ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 33.

⁸⁷ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 36.

⁸⁸ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 37.

Buber on the other hand, situates responses to the suffering of an individual in the I-Thou relationship with God and other persons, which sustains faith and gives meaning in the face of suffering. By giving the meaning to Buber's point of the responsibility of the individual to take part in human relationships and community building, Pinnock suggests that Buber is better able than Marcel to address the historical context of suffering. She insists that for Marcel, meaning is personal, while for Buber meaning is to better the world. According to Pinnock, Buber neither defends God's goodness with reasons why God permits evil, nor does he comment on whether God has the power to prevent or eliminate evil. Rather than engage in theodicy, Buber recommends prophetic prayer, which seeks and questions God, as the most fitting faith response.⁸⁹ For Buber, prophetic prayer is the expression of the prophetic faith of Judaism, in which one engages in moral acts, prayer, and protest in the face of suffering, which builds community.⁹⁰ Thus, for Buber, human "suffering can be interpreted as part of the redemption process, consisting of the mending of human relationships and the reuniting of God and the world"⁹¹ However, Pinnock, contending that Buber's "fundamental level of coping and responding to socially caused suffering is interpersonal," claims that Buber's "view of religious hope lacks an eschatological urgency and expectancy that demands revolutionary social change," and his "communal faith response to

⁸⁹ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 48.

⁹⁰ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 50-51.

⁹¹ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 49.

suffering does not articulate the importance of collective political action to resist the conditions causing suffering.”⁹²

Bloch and Metz are both influenced by Marxist theory and hence focus more so than Marcel and Buber, on the social dimensions of suffering. Pinnock understands that Bloch’s hope is “a political model of religious faith involving revolutionary political activity, which accompanies anticipation of the ultimate future.... [Accordingly] the practices of hope are criticism of ideologies and oppressive conditions, and political resistance.”⁹³ Having outlined Bloch’s interpretation of hope, Pinnock discusses a Christian application of this model of hope in the theology of Moltmann, who offers a mystical solidarity of man and God in *The Crucified God*. For Moltmann, the Christian cross shows how to suffer in a meaningful way and shows the real possibility for redemption.⁹⁴

Following Bloch’s perspective on history and hope and learning from the victims of the Holocaust, Metz concludes that protest against suffering is an appropriate response. According to Metz, the Trinity is not helpful for a representation of the history of human suffering, since it involves speculating about the inner history of the Trinity quite apart from human life. Instead, for Metz, Jesus’ suffering was freely chosen. The stories about Jesus become “a source of hope as well as critical memory.”⁹⁵ The memory of suffering, Metz insists, reminds

⁹² Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 54.

⁹³ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 69-70.

⁹⁴ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 88-90.

⁹⁵ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 88.

us that suffering is part of the human condition and that it cannot be ignored. Furthermore, it leads us to “analyze the causes of suffering, a step necessary for developing political strategies of resistance.”⁹⁶ Hence, the memory of suffering prompts resistance and social change. The goal of Metz’s theme of memory is to change the world, to protest, to investigate the socio-political causes of the pain, and to create a better society.

Pinnock interweaves the disciplines of philosophy of religion, post-Holocaust thought, and liberation theology to formulate a dynamic vision of religious hope and resistance. Pinnock makes nuanced judgments about the preferability of ‘political’ over ‘existential’ approaches to confronting and coping with evils. Above all, however, Pinnock wants to reveal that theoretical theodicies have been rejected as scandalous and immoral by these four existentialist and political philosophers and theologians. Pinnock makes the argument that coping with suffering within a faith context does not require a theoretical reconciliation of God and evil at all,⁹⁷ but only a practical response centered on solidarity with those who suffer in the world.⁹⁸ Pinnock proposes that practical approaches to theodicy are preferable to theoretical ones, since these have the advantage of being tested and applied in a particular context, even if they lack logical coherence.

Farley, in her book *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy*, breaks with the approach of traditional theodicy in three ways: She takes

⁹⁶ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 91.

⁹⁷ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 11.

⁹⁸ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 131.

suffering, especially “radical suffering,” to be the focus rather than sin; she takes tragedy, rather than the Fall of Adam and Eve, to be pivotal for theodicy; and she rejects domination as the proper understanding of power. Farley argues: “One of the most terrible beliefs of Christianity is that God punishes us with suffering.”⁹⁹ This belief attempts to justify the suffering of grief-stricken and pain-ridden individuals and groups to justify their continued oppression. She argues that this “theology conspires with pain to lock God away from the sufferer, for whom God becomes the ostensibly righteous torturer. The love of God is gone, and the pious sufferer is betrayed into the hands of despair.”¹⁰⁰ To correct this mistake, Farley moves away from traditional theodicies that are oriented toward cosmic guilt and punishment/atonement and instead takes up the paradigm of tragic vision and compassionate defiance.¹⁰¹ Her tragic vision is informed by two very distinct traditions: the Greek tragedy and its emphasis on inevitable suffering, and the biblical, prophetic injunction against injustice. The underlying assumption here is that evil is an inescapable part of life in the world and that freedom “is the tragic flaw of human existence, at once the stamp of its greatness and its destruction.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). 118.

¹⁰⁰ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 119.

¹⁰¹ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 29.

¹⁰² Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 37.

Furthermore, “a tragic vision is concerned with resistance to evil rather than justification of evil.”¹⁰³

Following the lead of Soelle, Farley’s point of tragic vision tends to criticize traditional approaches to theodicy that emphasizes categories of sin and retributive punishment in relation to the doctrine of atonement.

For Farley, radical suffering,¹⁰⁴ which is undeserved suffering that dehumanizes and destroys people, is much more focused than sin in her reconstructing work of theodicy. Farley argues that extreme suffering refuses to be explained simply as punishment that is somehow deserved or as the just retribution for sin. At the same time, she argues that “radical suffering confronts theology with a problem that cannot be addressed within the context of the myth of the Fall.”¹⁰⁵ Farley clearly recognizes that traditional Christian approaches to the problem of evil are governed by “thematics of guilt” and, hence, “do not have the tools to recognize or respond to the existence of unjust and destructive suffering.”¹⁰⁶

As an alternative to this paradigm, Farley develops her response to radical suffering with the theme of tragic vision and divine compassion. For Farley, radical evil and suffering in the world is handled in a way that does not connect it to guilt or deserved punishment. It cannot be accounted for by any atonement theory. It is

¹⁰³ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 97.

¹⁰⁴ “Radical suffering” is defined so well by Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 51-59.

¹⁰⁵ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 29.

¹⁰⁶ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 29.

immoral to justify radical suffering by explaining it as punishment for sin—what Farley calls traditional penal theodicy.¹⁰⁷ Arguing that none of the theodicies of classical theology can cope with this type of radical suffering, Farley develops her response to radical suffering with the approach of a phenomenology of compassion.¹⁰⁸ Farley prefers to use the paradigm of love to speak of God. Humanity experiences God's love through Divine Compassion which empowers people to actively resist evil and suffering. For Farley, God is neither indifferent nor powerless before evil. God is present and active through Divine Compassion. Divine Compassion is described as a power or a force but not as a force that conquers and dominates evil and suffering. Criticizing traditional theodicies for their tendency to focus on divine sovereignty rather than divine love, Farley contends that non-coercive divine love allows for the possibility of evil in the world but, at the same time, resists that evil.¹⁰⁹

3. B. Pastoral Response to Suffering

Swinton in his book *Raging with Compassion* crafts a pastoral theodicy that does not try to explain evil and suffering, but instead presents ways in which evil and suffering can be resisted and transformed.¹¹⁰ Swinton's theodical work is a pastoral work which attempts to reconstruct existing perspectives on evil and

¹⁰⁷ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 70.

¹⁰⁹ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 97-101.

¹¹⁰ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 4.

suffering and to help the church to perform pastoral practices faithfully. This becomes clearer in Swinton's description of practical theodicy:

Practical theodicy is the process wherein the church community, in and through its practices, offers subversive modes of resistance to the evil and suffering experienced by the world. The goal of practical theodicy is, by practicing these gestures of redemption, to enable people to continue to love God in the face of evil and suffering and in so doing to prevent tragic suffering from becoming evil.¹¹¹

Departing from traditional engagements with evil, Swinton develops a pastoral theodicy that urges faithful resistance to evil by means of practices such as lament, forgiveness, thoughtfulness, hospitality, and friendship.

Perhaps following the lead of Soelle on this topic, the practice of lament, according to Swinton, enables the voice silenced by evil to express pain and to demand that God answers.¹¹² As a repeated cry of pain, rage, sorrow, and grief in the midst of suffering and alienation, lament “allows us honestly to express rage to God for the injustice that constantly befall us but helps us at the same time to hold onto the compassion of God in the midst of human suffering.”¹¹³ Swinton explores ardently the dynamics of lamentation, providing practical instructions on lament that are intended to overcome afflictive suffering and to give a voice to suffering and release to one's rage, brokenness, sorrow, and grief. For Swinton, lament is “a pastoral practice that is crucial for practical theodicy,” because it ultimately enable

¹¹¹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 85.

¹¹² Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 104.

¹¹³ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 105.

both individual and community to find healing, hope and the ability to love of God in spite of the presence of evil and suffering.¹¹⁴

In the practice of forgiveness Swinton portrays the image of the broken body of Christ on the cross as a new epistemology of forgiveness. In this sense forgiveness is a world view that recognizes “evil in all of its fullness but refuses to respond to it in ways that encourage further evil.”¹¹⁵ Swinton argues that forgiveness demands reframing our natural responses to evil in ways that are countercultural but potentially transformative, because of our outrage and passion for justice.¹¹⁶ Swinton argues that forgiveness is “the most radical gift that God calls us to accept and share” in resisting evil and it is a dynamic healing power that resurrects “the humanness of those who have been dehumanized by our desire for vengeance.” It is the primary task of the Christian and the church.¹¹⁷

Resisting a traditional psychological approach that stresses a caregivers “neutral position,” Swinton proposes a posture of critical thinking and thoughtfulness: “Unless we learn the practice of critical thinking... we risk drifting into thought patterns and subsequent forms of action that are not only dissonant with the gospel but that can, in fact, become profoundly evil.”¹¹⁸ For example, Nazi Otto Eichmann, a killer of millions of Jews, can be understood as a

¹¹⁴ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 129.

¹¹⁵ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 164.

¹¹⁶ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 177.

¹¹⁷ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 178.

¹¹⁸ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 180.

thoughtless man caught up in a bureaucratic system, not an evil monster. Swinton, accordingly, argues that the lack of the ability to think critically can lead to various forms of evil, while critical thinking “can raise our consciousness to aspects of ourselves and our implication in implicitly evil practice that we may never otherwise have recognized.”¹¹⁹

Relying on Desmond Tutu’s notion of *ubuntu*¹²⁰ theology (“I am human because I belong”), Swinton also develops his idea of human nature as inherently relational being, which is traced by the image of God as relationship. In terms of Swinton’s words, human beings are “made in the image of a relationship-seeking God who is love.”¹²¹ Swinton relates this understanding of human beings to his theology of friendship. For Swinton, friendship is the ability to sit with strangers, those marginalized by society. In particular, Swinton emphasizes “refugees” and “asylum-seekers”¹²² as the strangers of today most in need of a friend. Therefore “xeno-racism: racism towards strangers”¹²³ is a commanding form of evil that is best resisted by friendship. Following Jesus as the ideal model and the source of all

¹¹⁹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 183.

¹²⁰ Swinton describes the meaning of this word, *ubuntu*, which is the African view of personhood: “Rather than perceiving human beings as discreet, unconnected individuals, *ubuntu* views them to be constituted as individuals through their relationships and affiliations to other individuals, communities, and ultimately to God. Within this worldview, personhood is not an individual possession. It is a gift that is bestowed on others within community.” See Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 202.

¹²¹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 204-205.

¹²² Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 229.

¹²³ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 232.

friendship, Swinton urges us to offer hospitality to strangers. Such “hospitality-in-friendship” is based on our identity in Christ. As an embodiment of the love and acceptance of Jesus, friendship mediates love, which drives out all kinds of fear, and finally becomes a powerful tool of resistance to any evil.¹²⁴

Swinton’s proposal calls for Christians to practice rituals that will both break the cycle of evil and offer hope. Moreover, the specific practices of “close solidarity” with sufferers, such as hospitality and friendship, resist evil by reframing it or by engaging it in a different social framework. For Swinton, the ability to withstand suffering comes from a relationship with God based on love. Swinton holds that “Loving God is the lynchpin of the Christian life and the key to resisting evil and enduring suffering.”¹²⁵ Loving God and others in and through suffering has the ability to break the power that eventually turns suffering into evil.

Swinton’s practical theodicy is located within Trinitarian breadth and Christological depth, where he approaches the problem of evil in a relational-affective way. In and through the relational milieu of divine love we have the ability to break the power that eventually turns suffering into evil. This divine love is creatively broadened in Swinton’s examination of the presence of the Holy Spirit in Christian communities that work to resist and transform the evil of the world. Swinton’s practical theodicy is especially suitable for believers in search of invigorating works to discern concrete pastoral responses to suffering. Also, his

¹²⁴ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 240-241.

¹²⁵ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 76-77.

pastoral approach offers practical modalities through which the voice of sufferers can be heard and resistance in the midst of evil can be actively performed.

3. C. A Suffering of God Theodicy

There are growing numbers of influential writers who have been attracted by the theme of divine suffering. Barry Whitney illustrates some important theologians who developed the theme of divine suffering, including Abraham Heschel, Terrence Fretheim, Paul Fiddes, Joseph Hallman, Warren McWilliams, Paul Schilling and Richard Bauckham.¹²⁶ Whitney, informing us that the contemporary concern with the question of divine suffering has arisen frequently out of situations in which suffering has been acute, illustrates that “English theologians responded to the devastation of the Second World War, Japan’s theologians responded to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Moltmann responded to his experience as a prisoner of war and developed it into a theology of the holocaust, and liberationists responded to social and economic discrimination and repression.”¹²⁷ Many theologians who have supported the passibility of God consider Moltmann as one of the most influential theologians in the theme of the suffering of God theodicy. Here, accordingly, I focus on Moltmann’s work in exploring the suffering of God theodicy.

¹²⁶ Barry L. Whitney, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil 1960-1991* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1998), 317-318.

¹²⁷ Whitney, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil 1960-1991*, 319.

In his very influential work *The Crucified God*,¹²⁸ Moltmann argues that God is perceived as one involved in the suffering and despair of the world. Lucien Richard, revealing that Moltmann's argument that any authentic theology today must come to terms with the theodicy question, contends that "there is no doubt that Moltmann's theology represents an impressive response to the God-question as it is raised in the face of suffering...and for Moltmann, the problem of suffering is not a theoretical issue for armchair theology, but one that directly concerns Christian praxis in solidarity with those who suffer."¹²⁹ Moltmann responds to the following questions: What gives hope in the faith of God in front of horrendous suffering? How is it possible to continue to love and hope in the midst of recurring despair, distress, and suffering? Those questions are directly connected to the practical responses to the problem of suffering and evil rather than the theoretical reconciliation between God and evil. It is also revealed in his refusal of traditional theistic ideas of God.

Moltmann explains the traditional conception of the 'Supreme Being' in theism, "The divine being is intransitory, immortal, unchangeable and impassible... God cannot suffer, God cannot die, says theism, in order to bring suffering, moral being under his protection,"¹³⁰ Moltmann argues that because of this sense of

¹²⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross as the Foundation and Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974).

¹²⁹ Richard, *What are They Saying about the Theology of Suffering?* 43.

¹³⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. 88, 216.

impassibility, “The God of theism is poor. He cannot love nor can he suffer.”¹³¹

Moltmann refuses to accept this traditional theistic idea of an apathetic God, which I mentioned in reference to Soelle. According to Moltmann, “Since Plato and Aristotle, God’s perfection has been designated as *apatheia*. God is good and cannot be the cause of evil. God is perfect and thus has no needs. God is sufficient and thus needs neither love nor hate. Nothing can befall him that would make him suffer. He knows neither wrath nor grace.”¹³²

Moltmann connects the understanding of the attributes of God to Jesus’ death on the cross. Moltmann argues that “God and suffering are no longer contradictions,”¹³³ and God can no longer be accused of being indifferent to suffering. Essential to Moltmann’s understanding of suffering is the intrinsic connection between suffering and love. For Moltmann, the suffering is an essential element of the will to live. However, contending that the dream of modern society is the life of painless happiness and of conquering every form of suffering, people anaesthetize pain, and suppress suffering, and by so doing rob themselves of the passion for life. Furthermore, the aspiration of a life without suffering leads to the oppression of others.¹³⁴ Conversely, Moltmann argues that the suffering of love has the power to liberate from suffering. God’s power, according to Moltmann,

¹³¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. 253.

¹³² Jürgen Moltmann, “The Crucified God,” *Theology Today*, 31 no 1 (April 1974): 10.

¹³³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. 227.

¹³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* (San Francisco: Harper Press, 1989), 151.

does not lie in his suppression of suffering, but in his embracing suffering out of love.¹³⁵

For Moltmann, the cross is the theme of God's compassionate love, a love which suffers in solidarity with those who suffer. The cross meets the problem of suffering with voluntary solidarity, which does not abolish suffering but overcomes the lack of love, the abandonment in suffering. Namely, the cross signifies that suffering is overcome by suffering and wounds are healed by wounds. The tragedy of suffering is met with the suffering of love on the cross. Moltmann speaks of the suffering of Christ as that of rejection and abandonment. Jesus was condemned to die as a blasphemer and as a rebel against the authorities.¹³⁶ In addition to this, Moltmann suggests that the suffering of Christ was greatest of all in relation to God, who rejected and abandoned him. For Moltmann, God is involved in the cross of Jesus, which logically means that "God himself suffered in Jesus, God himself died in Jesus for us. God is on the cross of Jesus 'for us.'"¹³⁷ Moltmann unambiguously claims that "God died on the cross of Christ."¹³⁸ For Moltmann, Jesus and the Father can never be separated. They are never opposed or divided, so that the kenosis of the Son must always be the kenosis of the Father. God, for Moltmann, is

¹³⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 46.

¹³⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. 126-45.

¹³⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. 192.

¹³⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. 216.

a suffering God,¹³⁹ whose suffering is “active suffering, the suffering of love, in which one voluntarily opens himself to the possibility of being affected by another,”¹⁴⁰ and thus God becomes a compassionate wounded healer.

3. D. The Characteristics of Practical/Pastoral Theodicy

In the previous section, I explored the development of contemporary practical/pastoral theodicy, focusing on theologians Soelle, Surin, Pinnock, Farley, Swinton, and Moltmann. Here, I will categorize and summarize the characteristics of practical/pastoral theodicy, focusing on the clarification of similarities revealed in their arguments. On the basis of this, I will clarify what I understand to be the key features of practical/pastoral theodicy.

It is true that the arguments of practical/pastoral theodicians are to some degree different because of their varied contexts and theological focal points that they want to approach in dealing with the practical response to the problem of suffering and evil. Surin mainly focuses his work through harsh criticisms he raises for theoretical theodicy, especially revealing specific reasons for the failure of theoretical theodicy.¹⁴¹ For him, a theoretical theodicy does not respond to the

¹³⁹ Moltmann sums up his understanding of the suffering God in the following way: “The sufferings of Christ” are God’s suffering because through them God shows his solidarity with human beings and his whole creation everywhere: God is with us. “The sufferings of Christ” are God’s sufferings because through them God intervenes vicariously on our behalf, saving us at the point where we are unable to stand but are forced to sink into nothingness: God is for us.” See Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 178.

¹⁴⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*. 230.

¹⁴¹ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 38-68.

cruelties that exist in the world especially in the contemporary social and political context. Within this context, only a practical theodicy is appropriate and useful for the alleviation of the causes of suffering. Pinnock and Farley focus their works on the experience of suffering, especially on those who are trapped within the context of extreme and destructive suffering. While Pinnock focuses her work on the responses to the Holocaust from both post-Holocaust Jewish and Christian thinkers who reject theodicy through their existential and political perspectives, Farley focuses her work on radical suffering more generally, and suggests Divine compassion as an empowering force that helps people actively resist such evil and suffering. Swinton, within the context of Christian life and practice of the Christian community, focuses on the pastoral work of theodicy, while Moltmann, responding in part to his experience as a prisoner of war, focuses on the conception that perceives God as one involved in the suffering and despair of the world. For Moltmann, only a suffering God can help us to heal our suffering and give hope to sufferers.

Although their approaches to theodicy differ to some degree, they are all mainly concerned with practical responses to the problem of suffering and evil. They focus their works on the practical aspect of theodicy, exploring ways that evil and suffering can be resisted and transformed. They are all opposed to theoretical theodicy's metaphysical conception of God and spotlight on God. They instead focus on how people can and do continue to love and trust God in the face of horrendous suffering. They all try to reconstruct existing perspectives on theodicy that seek to explain or justify God's reasons for causing or permitting suffering and to shift the attention to human suffering. A practical/pastoral approach is not

concerned with defending God's nature and motives, but rather strives to attend solely to the agony of suffering people. Accordingly, we come to recognize that in the rising of practical/pastoral theodicy a methodological shift took place theologically from a metaphysical paradigm (explanatory model) to a more existential and hermeneutical one (practical model).¹⁴²

These theodicians focus on a practical response to suffering from the perspective of those who are suffering and advocate practical/pastoral theodicy that is motivated by a theology of the cross and solidarity with those who suffer in the world. For example, Surin contends that sufferers experience "Godforsakenness," which leads us to adopt a *theologia crucis* as the way to deal with this problem.¹⁴³ Accordingly, he concludes that "the principle that the self-revelation of God on the cross of Christ is the self-justification of God is integral to the 'practical' approach to the theodicy-problem."¹⁴⁴ Pinnock indicates that a practical response centers on solidarity with those who suffer in the world, especially emphasizing the social factors contributing to suffering. She argues that solidarity "motivates protest and resistance on behalf of victims."¹⁴⁵ Swinton indicates the pastoral significance of Jesus' suffering: "Jesus identifies with the sufferer, and the sufferer finds solidarity

¹⁴² Daniel J. Louw, "Fides Quaerens Spem: A Pastoral and Theological Response to Suffering and Evil." *Interpretation* (October 2003): 384-390.

¹⁴³ Surin, "Theodicy?" 246.

¹⁴⁴ Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, 142.

¹⁴⁵ Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy*, 107.

in the co-suffering of Christ.”¹⁴⁶ Swinton’s practices of hospitality and friendship result from the theological reflection marked by “close solidarity” with the suffering people. Especially, for Moltmann, the cross is the symbol of love which suffers in solidarity with those who suffer, and the problem of suffering directly concerns “Christian praxis in solidarity with those who suffer.”¹⁴⁷

Lastly, practical theodicians tend to focus their works on the suffering love of God, which is revealed through the crucifixion of Christ and experienced by those who suffer from evil. For practical theodicy, the suffering love of God or divine compassion is closely connected with the fundamental solution to the problem of evil and suffering. For them, the suffering love of God plays a significant role in accomplishing the practical task of responding to and overcoming evil. For example, Swinton contends that the ability to resist evil and endure suffering comes from a relationship with God based on love.¹⁴⁸ Swinton argues that God’s power revealed in the midst of suffering “transforms evil not with force and might, but with the practice of persistent, vulnerable love.”¹⁴⁹ For Farley, God is neither indifferent nor powerless before evil. God is present and active through Divine Compassion, which is described as a power or force that is redemptive and non-coercive, and not dominating.¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, Farley argues

¹⁴⁶ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 99.

¹⁴⁷ Richard, *What are They Saying about the Theology of Suffering?* 43.

¹⁴⁸ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 76-77.

¹⁴⁹ Swinton, *Raging with Compassion*, 165-166.

¹⁵⁰ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 97.

that humanity experiences God's love through Divine Compassion which empowers people to actively resist evil and suffering. Moltmann, contending that God can no longer be accused of being indifferent to suffering,¹⁵¹ understands that God's power lies in God's embracing suffering out of love, not in God's suppression of suffering.¹⁵² For Moltmann, God is a suffering God, whose suffering signifies God's solidarity with those who suffer, in which the sufferer opens him/herself to the possibility of healing and hope.

Practical/pastoral theodicy concerns the reconstruction of traditional perspectives on the logical or evidential problems of evil, which seeks primarily to explain evil and suffering. The task of practical/pastoral theodicy is to shift the theoretical problem of theodicy to a more existential and experiential level. Practical/pastoral theodicy basically directs our thinking on the real or genuine problem of evil to the perspective of those who are suffering or the victims of evil. Practical/pastoral theodicy is intended to respond to the brutality and distortion that exist in the midst of our lives. Practical/pastoral theodicy emphasizes the theological themes of the cross, the solidarity with those who suffer in the world, and the suffering love of God or Divine compassion. They hope to provide practical theological tools for overcoming evil and suffering. The major questions that concern practical/pastoral theodicy are: What kinds of images or conceptions of God will help one to overcome the evil and suffering of the world? How does a person effectively deal with their suffering and the suffering of others? How does

¹⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 227.

¹⁵² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 46.

one find meaning in suffering, and alleviate or overcome it by way of action and resistance? The purpose of practical/pastoral theodicy is to provide the possibility of healing and hope that helps people continue to live in the love of God in the face of evil and suffering.

In this chapter I have focused on the contemporary practical/pastoral theodicy by way of exploring the criticisms of theoretical theodicy raised by practical/pastoral theodicians and the nature and characteristics of contemporary practical/pastoral theodicy. In their development of a sharp distinction between theoretical and practical theodicy, they tend to ignore or belittle the fact that the two kinds of theodicies are deeply interconnected. Moreover, many theoretical theodicians have responded substantially to the concerns raised by practical theodicians against theoretical theodicy. In Chapter 2 I will explore the significant major issues that the debate and discussion between theoretical and practical theodicy have given rise to.

Chapter II

Significant Issues in Contemporary Theodicy

In the previous chapter, I explored contemporary practical/pastoral responses to the problem of evil and suffering and their criticisms of theoretical theodicy, while clarifying the contemporary development of the distinction between theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy. These contemporary debates and discussions between practical and theoretical theodicy give rise to certain significant issues in theodicy. The issues arise from the criticisms of theoretical theodicy by practical theodicians, and the defensive responses of theoretical theodicians. Accordingly, in this chapter I will focus on three of these specific issues: the theoretical context for pastoral theodicy, the nature of God in relation to human suffering, and the destructive suffering of people.

These three issues of this chapter will be the key points of contact for the exploration of spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich in chapters III and IV. I will explore how spiritual themes of Julian's theology provide, in a direct or tangential way, positive contributions and implications for the issues that I will illustrate and discuss in this chapter. The first issue is related to the problem of abandoning theoretical theodicy. I will argue for the necessity of some theoretical context as a support for pastoral concerns. The second issue focuses on God's compassion through the exploration of the debate on God's passibility and compassion revealed in the Cross of Jesus Christ. From this issue, I will argue that co-suffering is the main characteristic of divine compassion in relation to human suffering, and it can provide consolation to the sufferer and bring healing and a deeper love of God. The

third issue is the nature of destructive suffering. I will explore especially the socio-political dimension of destructive suffering, and appropriate theological responses, with special reference to Christology and eschatology.

1. Theoretical Contexts for Pastoral Theodicy

1. A. The Problem of Abandoning Theoretical Theodicy

As I illustrated in a previous chapter, contemporary critics of theoretical theodicy, such as Kenneth Surin, Terrence Tilley, Sarah Pinnock, and John Swinton, similarly claim that traditional theoretical theodicy should be abandoned or subverted. Their summative reasons for abandoning theoretical theodicy are as follows: Theoretical theodicy does not engage particular experiences of evil; it limits moral evil to individual acts; and it legitimizes suffering and condones evil by ignoring its social dimensions. It does not provide any positive social responses for the victims of extreme suffering. Thus these critics claim theoretical theodicy is not only irrelevant in the context of suffering but is also immoral, which is a natural result of reconciling specific experiences of evil with God in an abstract and scholarly way.

In response to these concerns, in contemporary theodical debate some theologians defend theoretical theodicy. David O'Connor's article "In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy" defends theoretical theodicy against Surin's argument that theoretical theodicy is "irrelevant to the real problem, immoral, tacitly an

endorsement of evil, and undermined by the reality of evil.”¹⁵³ O’Connor agrees with Surin’s contention that philosophical questions regarding the problem of evil are typically irrelevant, or subject-irrelevant, to actual victims of evil and suffering, especially from the victim’s perspective. However, O’Connor insists that this preliminary argument does not provide sufficient support for Surin’s conclusion that theoretical theodicies are immoral, tacit sanctions of evil, or undermined by the evil experienced in the world. For O’Connor, theoretical theodicy, which is an essential intellectual project that attempts to understand God in light of evil in the world, is a different level of response to the actuality of evil in the world, as shown in pastoral approaches. Namely, an intellectual response is a “quite different sense of being an address to the victims” in contrast to the individual existential dimensions of the problem of evil. Accordingly, O’Connor argues that Surin develops the viewpoint that “theoretical theodicy is heartless, indifferent, and acquiescent in the face of real suffering” without considering the distinction between the conceptual and existential dimensions of the problem of evil.¹⁵⁴

Tilley criticizes theoretical theodicy for being too speculative and rationalistic. The theory attempts to explain too much and ignores the reality of the social structures of evil. In this way, theoretical theodicy draws our attention away from the reality of concrete suffering and the actions we can take to overcome these situations. Therefore, according to Tilley, theodicy itself is evil and also

¹⁵³ David O’Connor, “In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy,” *Modern Theology* 5:1 (1988): 61.

¹⁵⁴ O’Connor, “In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy,” 64.

creates evil.¹⁵⁵ In response to this argument, Dan Stiver argues that Tilley tends to draw the broad conclusion that no philosophical reflection on the problem of evil is advisable within the narrow definition of theodicy, and that it would be a difficult task to prove such extravagant claims. At the same time, Stiver criticizes Tilley for not recognizing that the problem could be the result of poor or inadequate theodicy and not one of theodicy *per se*. Thus, his rejection of theodicy actually removes what is most needed in some cases.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, arguing that the conclusion does not follow that theodicy must be abandoned, Stiver claims that one should take into consideration these criticisms and strive to effectively respond to them.

In a similar vein, Michael Stoeber contends that the harsh criticisms by practical theodicyists against traditional theoretical theodicy are often exaggerated and do not apply to all themes in theoretical theodicy. Theodicy itself is not evil in principle, and all attempts of theodicy do not necessarily fail. Stoeber insists that theoretical theodicy should not be abandoned, but only that it “ought to do better.”¹⁵⁷ Marilyn McCord Adams also argues that the critics of theoretical theodicy have mistakenly made the claim that theoretical theodicies are “both conceptually confused and morally pernicious.”¹⁵⁸ Although Adams confirms that

¹⁵⁵ See Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 3 and Ch. 9 in “The Evils of Theodicy.”

¹⁵⁶ Dan Stiver, “The Problem of Theodicy,” *Review & Expositor*, 93 no. 4 (Fall 1996): 511, 514.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation* (New York and Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 65.

¹⁵⁸ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 184.

authors such as Plantinga and Swinburn recognize that “their philosophical reflections don’t automatically work pastoral cures; all concur that the criterion of pastoral effectiveness is irrelevant to their enterprise,” she strongly objects that philosophical reflection on the problem of suffering is not irrelevant and immoral.¹⁵⁹

Barry Whitney focuses especially on Pinnock’s criticisms of theoretical theodicy, observing how her position implies that theoretical theodicies are “epistemologically absurd (Kant), morally scandalous, and harmful, insofar as they condone evils by ignoring their social dimensions.”¹⁶⁰ Whitney argues that Pinnock’s view of theoretical theodicies are *all* wrongly modeled on those of Leibniz and Hegel, which prompts her view, that theodicy is intolerant and irrelevant to individual instances of suffering.¹⁶¹ Whitney claims that traditional theodicies are certainly not all arrogant, abstract justifications of all evils, irrelevant to the individual sufferer, and engaged in immoral activity. Rather, some theodicies

¹⁵⁹ Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 184-186.

¹⁶⁰ Barry Whitney, “The Review of Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*, 31 no 3-4 (2002), 473. See also Barry Whitney’s article, “Anti-Theodicy: Is Theodicy Itself Evil?” from the internet page: <http://drbarrywhitney.com/blw-7theodicy-1d.html>.

¹⁶¹ According to Whitney, Pinnock follows closely the views of Surin and Tilley who reject the Enlightenment theodicies of Leibniz and Hegel as particularly objectionable. “Such theodicies claimed to *fully* justify evil and suffering in a cold-hearted, insensitive and purely theoretical manner that is all-but-irrelevant to individual sufferers in their particular situations. Worse yet, they “effaced” the social causes of suffering and render protest and other practical coping methods meaningless. Yet, in my view, this condemnation assumes that Leibnizian-Hegelian theodicy is the model of contemporary theodicies. I hardly think it is.” See Whitney’s article, “Anti-Theodicy: Is Theodicy Itself Evil?”

are legitimate and necessary rational theological reflections on suffering and the relationship to God. Generally, such reflections are far more humble and tentative in their claims than the author's caricature suggests. Accordingly, Whitney asserts that he sees no reason to follow Pinnock's advice to jettison theoretical theodicies and replace them with practical responses.¹⁶²

Indeed, practical theodicy seems in certain respects dependent on theoretical theodicy. O'Connor argues that the cognitive dimension of theoretical theodicies plays a significant role in defending theoretical theodicies against anti-theodacists, and without this cognitive dimension, a practical response to suffering would not have force. In order to offer a more positive account of theoretical theodicy, O'Connor distinguishes between "two facets of religious belief," which are understood firstly as life-guiding and secondly as cognitive. In the first sense, O'Connor indicates that religious belief is life-guiding as a "source of strength, of inspiration, of confidence, comfort and hope."¹⁶³ This facet of religious belief is placed in the communal relationships and the rituals in a religious community, and the instruction of personal development.

At the same time, O'Connor identifies the cognitive facet, which includes the theories that guide and instruct the faith. In Christianity, this facet is identified as "theism," and "is centered on the proposition that an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, just, benign, worshipful being exists, the creator and sustainer of

¹⁶² Whitney, "The Review of Beyond Theodicy," 473-474.

¹⁶³ O'Connor, "In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy," 67.

the universe.”¹⁶⁴ In accordance with this proposition, the cognitive facet materializes in and through theories and theologies that legitimize, justify, or argue the “truth-value” of these assertions.

In order to discuss the relationship between these two facets of religious belief, O’Connor uses a military metaphor. Within this metaphor, the life-guiding facet is represented by the citizenry, while the cognitive facet is represented by defensive systems that protect the everyday life of the community. In such a situation, defensive systems, though often remote from the concerns and interests of the citizenry, are evident as soon as there is a perceived threat to everyday life. In this same way, O’Connor claims the life-guiding facet of religious belief is dependent on the cognitive facet for its survival and preservation. Even though the life-guiding facet is often completely oblivious to theories that occur at the cognitive level, such theories provide a person’s religious faith with intellectual and rational justification. Without them, religion would be reduced to its “life-guiding dimension, and as such to vying with the many and various therapies and self-help schemes so readily offered in our marketplaces.”¹⁶⁵ Because theoretical theodicies are an expression of this cognitive facet, O’Connor claims that they also fulfill this defensive role. Without this defense, a practical response to suffering—an expression of the life-guiding aspect of religious belief—would not exist. Therefore he concludes that even though theoretical theodicies may not seem subject-relevant to the actual victims of suffering, they are necessary because they

¹⁶⁴ O’Connor, “In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy,” 67.

¹⁶⁵ O’Connor, “In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy,” 68.

affect our understanding of the universe and human life, help victims to interpret their context, sustain religion's integral claim to a transcendent dimension in human life, and finally provide a language of sufficient conceptual richness and a reasoned defense to the existential-ministerial problem of evil.¹⁶⁶

In line with O'Connor's argument, Adams adds an exemplification of doctors' theories, which are theoretical ways of approaching medical problems. Although these theories may be inappropriate to explain to suffering patients, they are nevertheless relevant to their suffering and may have the potential to put an end to its causes. In addition, Adams claims that theoretical theodacists' responses to evil may be motivated by their own experiences of evil. They are also vulnerable to the experience of horror. Accordingly, Adams argues that they cannot be accused of the disinterestedness or abstractness the critics charge them with.¹⁶⁷

In addition, Whitney insists that anti-theodacists can justly be accused of denying explanations to the sufferer who sometimes seeks not just consolation but explanation. At the same time, he claims, this explanation as a rational reflection about God and suffering is based largely on interpretations of biblical texts. Whitney harshly criticizes anti-theodacists when he says, "Such a disregard for biblical and theological tradition seems to me nothing short of another step in the postmodernist rejection of an absolute truth in favor of pragmatism."¹⁶⁸ Whitney concludes his article saying, "Theology cannot be disregarded or suspended, even

¹⁶⁶ O'Connor, "In Defense of Theoretical Theodicy," 68, 70-71.

¹⁶⁷ Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 187-188.

¹⁶⁸ See Whitney's article, "Anti-Theodicy: Is Theodicy Itself Evil?"

in pragmatic attempts to console the sufferer. Theology is unavoidably implicit and inescapable. The real question is how valid the theology is.”¹⁶⁹

1. B. Reclaiming Theoretical Theodicy

In his article “The Problem of Theodicy,” Stiver categorizes critics of theodicy into three main groups or models. The first group proposes the revision of theodicy. The second group, embracing the rejection model of theodicy, argues that after a strong denunciation of theodicy, there is a contradictory return to a revised theodicy that is similar to the first option. In the third case, there is a consistent refusal to engage in theodicy but at the expense of other contradictory elements.¹⁷⁰

Stiver supports the revision model of theodicy, which he considers to be the most desirable because it is not only the only consistent one but also it can profitably draw on resources provided by the other two. In the end, Stiver claims that theodicians have to provide searching criticism of the reflection of traditional theodicy without rejecting theodicy. He claims that the rejection type of theodicy and its reflections on the issues of theodicy, however inconsistent, are often very useful in developing a revised theodicy. In addition, theodicians also must show

¹⁶⁹ See Whitney’s article, “Anti-Theodicy: Is Theodicy Itself Evil?”

¹⁷⁰ Stiver, “The Problem of Theodicy,” 507. Stiver cites theologians who represent each model of theodicy: in the revision model of theodicy he includes Marilyn McCord Adams and Burton Cooper, *Why, God?* (1988). For the second model, the rejection of theodicy, he illustrates Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion* (1990), and William H. Willimon, *Sighing for Eden* (1985). Lastly, Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming the Silences: God, Medicine, and the Problem of Suffering* (1990) and Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (1991) are vigorous examples of a more consistent anti-theodicy position. See Stiver, “The Problem of Theodicy,” 507-517.

how better reflection can provide answers to existential dilemmas that are in part intellectual.¹⁷¹

The revision model of theodicy criticizes the way theodicy has limited itself to a theism that ignores particularities of the Christian faith. Stiver considers Adams a good example of this revision model of theodicy because Adams recognizes that traditional theodicy has had the effect of ruling out important Christian resources, such as the cross and the resurrection of Christ and of distorting Christian viewpoints.¹⁷² For Stiver, Adams' most important task is to offer a theodicy for believers and nonbelievers, as well as a resolution to both the logical and practical problems of evil.

Adams, rejecting any dichotomizing of philosophical reflection on horrors and praxis that cope with them, envisions a “marriage” between them:

I have meant to chart a *via media* that rejects any dichotomizing of philosophical reflection on horrors, on the one hand, and praxis that copes with them, on the other. If they are not the same, I nevertheless envision a marriage between them. To appreciate their partnership—my unoriginal idea that there can be “consolation” in “philosophy”—it should be enough to consider that personal meaning-making is an engaged praxis. . . . Yet, engaged praxis is not opposed to theory. Rather, like the well-trained and attentive physician, the individual and his/her intimates have a privileged feel for which parts of theory apply.¹⁷³

As this process occurs, particularly in response to suffering, the individual integrates both theoretical and practical dimensions in his or her attempt to respond

¹⁷¹ Stiver, “The Problem of Theodicy,” 515.

¹⁷² Stiver, “The Problem of Theodicy,” 508.

¹⁷³ Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 186–187.

and move forward, each of which provides different types of intellectual and pastoral support.

Adams concurs with the critics that there are cases showing that what is required in the face of extreme suffering is typically a practical response. However, she insists that a philosophical response may be what is required at a later stage. Adams indicates that many participants in horrors, once the initial stage of suffering has passed and the suffering has subsided or ceased, repeatedly raise questions of meaning: “of why God allowed it, of whether and how God could redeem it, of whether or how their lives could now be worth living, of what reason there is to go on?”¹⁷⁴ Adams thus asserts that theoretical approaches to the problem of evil can help, because those who survive participation in horrors have to learn afterward to integrate their experiences of the goodness of God and horrendous evil into the whole of a meaningful life. In the end, for Adams, traditional theoretical theodicies can generate the consolation that can be equally considered a practical response to evil and suffering in the world.

The critics of theoretical theodicy, who call for its abandonment as a whole, conclude that theoretical theodicy does not bring healing and hope for a deeper love of God, especially for those who face extreme suffering. It is true that what is required in the face of extreme suffering is a practical response. Stoeber agrees that some theoretical theodicy has tended to belittle the incredible suffering of victims. However, Stoeber insists that abandoning theoretical theodicy would be tantamount to abandoning the hope of Christian theodicy, which suggests that the love and

¹⁷⁴ Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 187-188.

justice of an all-powerful God can be reconciled with the evils of destructive suffering. Once this hope of reconciliation is abandoned, the religious motivation required to develop a practical response to suffering is also lost.

Stoeber argues that completely abandoning the theoretical themes of theodicy entails certain negative consequences for both theology and pastoral practice. Stoeber's analysis of religious critics of theodicy such as Tilley, Grace Jantzen, and Surin¹⁷⁵ sympathizes with their criticisms regarding the aspects of moral impropriety found in some themes of theodicy, which tends to demean the traumatic experiences of victims and inevitably denies the evil nature of these experiences. However, Stoeber argues their harsh criticisms of theoretical theodicy are overstated in the sense that this aspect of the theory does not mean that "all themes of theodicy are doomed to failure or that theodicy itself is evil in principle."¹⁷⁶ Such a radical abandonment would also exclude the hope for the healing and ultimate redemption of the victims. For Stoeber, it is very important for Christians to retain the hope that "God's goodness, love, and power are sufficient to overcome the effects of destructive suffering for the victims."¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, Stoeber argues that some effective themes of theodicy support one's religious hope for the healing and redemption of victims. He states that in any instance of suffering, "one is called to attend compassionately to the victim of

¹⁷⁵ For Stoeber's analysis, see Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 63-65.

¹⁷⁶ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 65.

¹⁷⁷ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 66.

destructive suffering, not to speculate about theodicy.”¹⁷⁸ However, such a pastoral response does not mean that this approach has nothing to do with theoretical theodicy, because theoretical theodicy should support a pastoral response and also offer the hope that victims will heal and be redeemed. Stoeber argues, “Effective themes of theodicy will give intelligible voice to it.”¹⁷⁹ Accordingly, it becomes clear that without theoretical theodicy there remains no basis or grounding for hope for the healing and redemption of victims of evil and suffering. Theoretical theodicy is necessary to support especially the hope for the victim of destructive suffering.

In summary, theologians in favor of abandoning theoretical theodicy do not provide sufficient evidence to show it to be immoral, irrelevant, and a tacit sanction of evil, and theoretical theodicy is necessary because it fulfills a defensive role for practical theodicy in expressing a cognitive dimension and providing theological hope and motivating practical responses to evil and suffering in the world. The imperative to abandon or subvert theoretical theodicy is inappropriate. In addition, we must recognize that theoretical theodicies can effectively generate consolation that can be equally considered a practical response to evil and suffering in the world. As Whitney observes, some themes of theodicy can help particular people who are seeking for theological explanations of their experiences of evil and

¹⁷⁸ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 67.

¹⁷⁹ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 66.

suffering.¹⁸⁰ Also, as Adams claims, theoretical theodicy can also generate an effective practical response. In addition, as Stoeber argues, some effective themes of theoretical theodicy are required to properly support pastoral concerns. For example, an afterlife belief, in conjunction with other themes of theodicy, might allow one to hope for the healing and recovery from the effects of destructive suffering in an afterlife context, along with the hope for the ultimate spiritual redemption of all humanity.¹⁸¹

Accordingly, we come to recognize that all attempts at theodicy are not destined to failure and that theodicy itself is not evil in nature; theoretical theodicy can help provide the motivation necessary for a practical response to evil and suffering in the world. At the same time, we come to recognize that the issues raised by the critics of theoretical theodicy suggest that “theologians ought to do better.”¹⁸² As Whitney observes, “the real question is how valid the theology is.”¹⁸³ So theoretical theodicy needs to be reclaimed. Theodicy needs to draw more on particular resources of the Christian faith, such as the cross, the resurrection of Christ, and the belief in an afterlife.

¹⁸⁰ See Whitney’s article, “Anti-Theodicy: Is Theodicy Itself Evil?” and Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 187-188.

¹⁸¹ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 66-67.

¹⁸² Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 78, 74, 65.

¹⁸³ See Whitney’s article, “Anti-Theodicy: Is Theodicy Itself Evil?” Whitney says, “Theology, furthermore, cannot be disregarded or suspended, even in pragmatic attempts to console the sufferer. Theology is unavoidably implicit and inescapable. The real question is how valid the theology is.”

Among the writers I mention in this chapter, I consider Adams and Stoerber good proponents for this reclaiming theodicy model, because they exemplify how theodicy can be conducted in such a way as to avoid the errors of traditional theodicy. Effective theodicy needs a paradigm of integration between theoretical and practical theodicy. It needs to draw on some constructive resources provided by critics of theoretical theodicy, while at the same time maintaining the theological consistency in its work. It needs to ensure that the response to suffering and evil does not encourage the theological distortions and social evils identified by critics of theoretical theodicy, but it will also maintain the integral aspects of theoretical theology that make a practical response to evil possible.

2. God in Relation to Human Suffering: The Compassion of God

2. A. The Question of Divine Suffering

One crucial issue that arises in the theoretical-practical theodicy debate is the question of God's relationship to and involvement in human suffering. The recent divine impassibility debate¹⁸⁴ has been concerned with the theological and philosophical arguments for and against a suffering God. At the same time, the question of God's passibility is related to a surprising number of areas significant to contemporary theology, especially for issues in Christology and theodicy.

¹⁸⁴ The impassibility thesis is the claim that God does not undergo sensory experience including suffering and pain, nor is God subject to corruption, substantial essential change or external agency. Divine passibility refers to the hypothesis that God feels the suffering and joy of the world. Passibility implies that God not only knows all propositions that are true of the world but that He subjectively experiences, either partially or entirely, what is experienced within the world.

Accordingly, in this section I will assess the contemporary divine impassibility debate in special relation to this second major contemporary theological issue, the problem of divine suffering in relation to human suffering, by initially focusing on the exploration of contrasting views of Marcel Sarot and Adrio König, who are in favor of passibilism, and Ronald Goetz and Thomas Weinandy, who are against passibilism.

First, I will look into the causes of the popularity of passibilism today within the context of contemporary cultural and religious experience. Goetz illustrates four historical factors that contributed to the rise of passibilism in the cultural religious context:

(1) the decline of Christendom; (2) the rise of democratic aspirations; (3) the problems of suffering and evil as they relate to the scientific understanding of natural history and to the peculiar impact of suffering and evil on the modern consciousness; and (4) the critical reappraisal of the Bible in light of all of the above.¹⁸⁵

In line with Goetz, Weinandy asserts that “with the demise of nineteenth-century optimism and in the face of the social suffering caused by the Industrial Revolution and the agony of World War I, the passibility of God found a cultural climate in which to sprout.”¹⁸⁶ In addition, Weinandy admits that in a culture where the dominant virtues are compassion and empathy, it is very tempting to think of God

¹⁸⁵ Ronald Goetz, “The Suffering of God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,” *The Christian Century*, April 16, (1986): 386.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 2.

as being compassionate and empathic; he suffers as we suffer.¹⁸⁷ Anastasia Foyle also states that “one phenomenon that is reiterated both as an argument in favor of passibilism, and as a cultural factor occasioning passibilism’s rise, is the existence of, or an increase in, suffering.”¹⁸⁸ In the cultural context of the rise of passibilism, some theologians have been drawn to the idea of a suffering God to help resolve the problem of evil. For them, the task of theodicy is to recast God’s moral credibility, which requires God to be emotionally affected by the sufferings of the world.

This analysis will explore the main points of argument within the contemporary divine im/passibility debate. Sarot, who is in favor of passibilism, criticizes the fact that the Church Fathers had rejected passibilism because not only were they firmly convinced that God cannot be the passive victim of his own irrational effects, but they also did not want to give up the idea of God’s unconditioned-ness.¹⁸⁹ In addition, Sarot suggests that the Bible depicts God as passible and able to suffer when he contends that “the Scriptures refer to God as feeling and as emotionally involved, and early Christianity has generally recognized this.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Thomas Weinandy, “Does God Suffer?” *First Things*, no 117 (Nov, 2001): 35.

¹⁸⁸ Anastasia Foyle, “Human and Divine Suffering,” *Ars Disputandi* [<http://www.ArsDisputandi.org>] 5 (2005), paragraph number; 1.

¹⁸⁹ Marcel Sarot, “Divine Suffering: Continuity and Discontinuity with the Tradition” *Anglican Theological Review* 78 no 2 (Spring 1996): 237-238.

¹⁹⁰ Sarot, “Divine Suffering,” 231.

Weinandy, however, contends that the present critique of the Fathers is entirely misconceived. Contemporary theologians wrongly hold that the impassibility of God signifies some negative attribute of God, that is, the idea that God is static, lifeless and inert, and therefore completely devoid of passion. Weinandy indicates that the Fathers were concerned with defending the complete otherness of the one God in relation to the created order, as found in Scripture, and argues that almost all of the early Fathers attributed impassibility to God in order to protect and enhance the idea of God's utterly passionate love and all-consuming goodness.¹⁹¹ In the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility, God is characterized as an unmoved Mover who draws our hearts towards loving God and our neighbors. In this view, he is himself free from emotions, the intense and fluctuating affective states that characterize human beings. However, Sarot suggests that God is a moved Mover instead of an unmoved Mover when he argues, "God is not a passive victim of God's emotions, but God primarily is a Mover, an Actor, taking initiatives and keeping control, even though he chooses to have feelings and to be vulnerable."¹⁹²

Theologians in favor of passibilism present a strong argument that a good God should be able to help and to console the suffering and that only a God who is suffering himself is capable of doing this. To those theologians, a good God is a co-sufferer. In addition, Sarot considers the vulnerability of God's love a theological point that is of prime importance to theologians who favor passibility.

¹⁹¹ Weinandy, "Does God Suffer?" 38.

¹⁹² Sarot, "Divine Suffering," 237.

Sarot says, “Vulnerability is a consequence of the need-character of God’s love: it is exactly the fact that God desires that the human beings he loves both lead a happy life and return his love that makes God vulnerable to anything that goes wrong.”¹⁹³ For Sarot, the vulnerability of God’s love is the chief theological element that a good God as a co-sufferer has. Weinandy, however, argues that “He [God] is ontologically immutable—that is, ontologically unchanging in His perfect love and goodness.”¹⁹⁴ For Weinandy, God is perfectly compassionate—not because God suffers with those who suffer but because God’s love fully and freely embraces those who suffer. This love of God without suffering can be completely altruistic and beneficent. It is love and not suffering that ultimately is at the heart of compassion and brings true healing and comfort. He argues that this compassion of God is the truth because “God’s compassion is most clearly manifested in His divine power and perfect goodness through which He overcomes evil and the suffering that it causes.”¹⁹⁵

The problem of Jesus’ impassible divine nature is another important argument of the divine impassibility debate. Theologians who object to the passibility of God claim that Christ’s experiences cannot simply be ascribed to God because the Bible does not state this. On the contrary, the Bible makes a clear distinction between Christ and God: Christ—not God—suffered, was crucified, and died. They criticize that the passibilitists have overlooked Christ’s unique position

¹⁹³ Sarot, “Divine Suffering,” 236.

¹⁹⁴ Weinandy, “Does God Suffer?” 38.

¹⁹⁵ Weinandy, “Does God Suffer?” 40.

as mediator between God and humans and also the incomprehensible mysterious unity of his two natures.¹⁹⁶ However, König asks the following question: “If God cannot change in any sense whatever, how could God the Son become what he had not been previously—a man?”¹⁹⁷ He indicates that when the mutability of God is denied so adamantly, the authentic incarnation of the Logos will be endangered. König’s viewpoint shows that theologians favoring passibilism generally argue that the Scriptural testimony of Jesus’ suffering and death must also apply to His divine nature. Therefore, if the Son of God in fact became a man, He must also have suffered and died. If one denies this, he or she will always have great difficulty accepting the unity of the two natures in the one divine person of Jesus Christ.

The analysis of recent work on the impassibility debate previously discussed indicates that the rise of passibilism is culturally occasioned in the context of increasing human suffering; furthermore, contemporary instances of extreme suffering are historically concurrent with the emergence of passibilist thought. Passibilist theologians have identified the suffering of humanity as a primary concern. Thus, many theologians relate their passibilist conclusions to their own experiences of or reflections on human suffering. The idea of passibilism often presupposes that God’s empathetic suffering alleviates suffering or is a consolation to victims.

¹⁹⁶ Adrio König, “The Idea of ‘the Crucified God’: Some Systematic Questions” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no 39 (Je 1982): 58-59.

¹⁹⁷ König, “The Idea of ‘the Crucified God,’” 60.

For passibilists, the co-suffering of God can both reduce the threatening character of suffering itself and support those who suffer and help them change their attitudes toward suffering. For example, Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Soelle distance themselves from classical responses to the problem of evil and affirm the sympathetic and empathetic suffering of God for humanity. Their response to the existence of extreme suffering is to assert that God suffers with the oppressed. Many consider the doctrine of impassibility no longer acceptable because they take God's impassibility to be a sign of an apathetic God. They argue that the understanding of an apathetic God originates from the Greek concept of apathy (*απάθεια*), which was pursued as an ideal because it guaranteed an undisturbed operation of the rational mind.

Viewing some traditional Christian theologies of suffering as forms of masochism involving a perversion of love, Soelle argues that an apathetic God cannot lead us to an authentic understanding of suffering because such a God “is the almighty ruler whose only relationship with suffering is that he causes or sends it and that he takes it away.”¹⁹⁸ Soelle criticizes that such an apathetic God is an obstacle to any attempt at giving meaning to suffering, and it is truly a stumbling block when it comes to the suffering of the apparently innocent.¹⁹⁹ Instead of this apathetic nature of God, many contemporary theologians underline the

¹⁹⁸ Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*, translated by Everett R. Kalin (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1975), 143.

¹⁹⁹ For more information on Soelle's critical analysis of the concept of an apathetic God and its implications on political area, refer to Soelle's *Suffering*, 41-48.

vulnerability of God's love. For them, God's vulnerability is the chief theological element in understanding God's nature, especially when dealing with the suffering of the innocent.

It is, however, undeniable that we face tricky problems raised by the contemporary divine impassibility debate. Impassibilists argue that it does not seem that strong passibility is required to justify God's goodness in the face of evil. Henry Simoni, for example, poses a problem that "If God was a suffering God, that might make theodicy even more difficult, for we would have to justify why God is not only a sadist but also a masochist, that is, we would have to explain why the divine essence would create a world that would cause it pain."²⁰⁰ In addition, they propose a problem of eschatological reality, arguing that any concept of a limited deity has a possibility of causing the denial of the capacity of God to redeem the world, as seen from the point of view that a suffering God becomes God as a being limited in power.²⁰¹ On the other hand, passibilists argue that denying strong passibility makes it difficult to see how God loves us, since a loving relationship seems to require real empathy. In addition, passibilists point out that an impassible God implies that God has created a world in which some people unjustly suffer horrifying wretchedness and pain while God remains in perfect equilibrium, which seems to significantly undermine the depiction of a compassionate, loving God.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Henry Simoni, "Divine Passibility and the Problem of Radical Particularity: Does God Feel Your Pain?" *Religious Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep., 1997): 346.

²⁰¹ Goetz, "The Suffering of God," 388.

²⁰² Simoni, "Divine Passibility," 344.

2. B. God's Compassion in Relation to Human Suffering

In this section, I will explore the compassion of God by comparing and contrasting the nature of God in relation to human suffering. In order to fully develop this issue, I will first clarify the meaning of compassion. Then, I will explore the significance of God's compassion in responding to human suffering, focusing on the compassionate incarnation of God in Christ. Lastly, I will explore a theological reinterpretation of God's omnipotence based on the theory that God's power should be perceived in terms of God's compassion because it helps find meaning in suffering and confronting evil.

Oliver Davies defines compassion as “the recognition of another's condition, entailing a degree of participation in the suffering of the other, an embrace of that fellow-suffering, and a preparedness to act on their behalf.”²⁰³

Robert C. Roberts distinguishes compassion from other forms of love by the terms of its fellowship. Compassion differs from all types of friendship, family affection, conjugal love, and love for fellow believers because the meaning of compassion is fundamentally based on a fellowship in suffering or deficiency.²⁰⁴ Our capacity to

²⁰³ Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 233. Davies illustrates various terms of compassion in some different languages: the English word ‘compassion’ itself, intrinsically conveys the sense of ‘fellow-suffering’ or ‘suffering with,’ as does the Latin words *commiseratio* and *compassio*, the Greek words *συμάθεια* (*συμπαθεῖν*) and *συμπάσχειν*, and the German *Mitleid*. Davies sums up, “Where these words are used, we can be sure that the notion of ‘fellow-suffering’ is implied.” See Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, 234.

²⁰⁴ Robert C. Roberts, “Compassion,” *The Christian Century* (January 5-12, 1983), 14.

treat others with compassion comes from our ability to see within ourselves the same potential for weakness, suffering, or sin that we see in other people; namely to perceive the vulnerability of human nature. Thus, Roberts contends the development of compassion requires “both the experience of suffering, finitude and sin and an acceptance of these as a part of one’s identity.”²⁰⁵ What an individual most needs to be compassionate is an acceptance of this vulnerability as a part of his or her present self.

Stoeber explores the meaning of compassion by contrasting apathy, distorted empathy (sadism and masochism), and compassion. First, Stoeber defines empathy and compassion in the following manner:

Empathy is the ability to reach out to another and feel her or his emotions—to relate to another person intimately through a sharing of their thoughts and feelings. . . . [Namely,] empathy is a feeling-along-with others. Compassion is a feeling-along-with the suffering of others through a framework of love. Genuine compassion involves an affectionate sharing of the suffering of another person, whereby the sufferer might feel the support and receive it in this interchange of love. The exchanged love literally soothes and consoles the sufferer, which stimulates healing.²⁰⁶

To understand genuine empathy, Stoeber contrasts it with apathy, sadism and masochism in reference to suffering. According to Stoeber, genuine empathy is entirely different from apathy, which involves indifference to suffering. It is also very different from sadism and masochism, which are “passionate stances toward others, where distorted pleasure is experienced in empathetic identification with

²⁰⁵ Roberts, “Compassion,” 15.

²⁰⁶ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 27, 29.

their suffering experiences.”²⁰⁷ However, contending that genuine empathy naturally “moves us to try to reduce suffering” and “usually moves one to compassion,” Stoeber concludes that genuine empathy “is the projection of one’s personality upon the consciousness of another person who is suffering, and experiencing, comprehending and actively responding to her or his suffering in a compassionate fashion—that is, within a consciousness of empathetic love.”²⁰⁸

Defining compassion as an altruistic emotion, Brian Carr contends that compassion is directed at the needs of others and gives a prima facie case to support its status as a social virtue, where compassion is understood not only as a human emotion, but also as a social virtue. Fundamentally, compassion involves concern for other people’s values, needs and wants, in terms of which their suffering can be understood and therefore shared. Carr insists that “compassion essentially takes us out of ourselves, to the hearts and minds of other people, and functions thereby as an important social virtue, [and thus contributes to] the moral enrichment of social life in the major areas of political leadership, welfare planning, legal reasoning and public institutions.”²⁰⁹

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the meaning of compassion takes a priority because it is closely linked with the compassionate action of God for God’s people. God’s compassionate action means that even though God abhors much sin, God is

²⁰⁷ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 38.

²⁰⁸ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 37-38.

²⁰⁹ Brian Carr, “Pity and Compassion as Social Virtues,” *Philosophy*, Vol. 74, No. 289 (Jul., 1999): 411, 419.

unwilling to separate God's self from us. Rather, God comes to us precisely because of our weaknesses, suffering, and sins. We can recognize this distinctively from the compassionate incarnation of God in Christ, which, I think, is the center of the Christian faith, for the Christian story is that of Emmanuel, God with us. God identifies with us by an adjustment of identity in our direction and for our sakes. God chooses to identify with the weak and sinful and becomes like a sinner for their sake. This signifies that the Son of God "took on human nature, including bodiliness, susceptibility to pain and death, the whole range of human sadness and joy and even, mysteriously, sin."²¹⁰

Arguing that the incarnation of God in Christ is the foundation for all Christian knowledge of God, Davies contends that "Compassion in this sense then represents the transformation of humanity by the supremely compassionate act of God in the incarnation."²¹¹ For Christians, it is Jesus Christ who embodies the compassionate and liberating action of God, and the symbols and stories of Jesus provide indications for understanding how divine compassion is present to history. Thus, Wendy Farley argues that the incarnation of God in Christ "symbolizes the efficacy of divine power in historical existence," and that "incarnation as a symbol of redemptive power in history is a compelling paradigm for divine presence."²¹² For Farley, the incarnation of divine love is compassion, which, as a redemptive

²¹⁰ Roberts, "Compassion," 16-17.

²¹¹ Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, 249.

²¹² Wendy Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). 113-114.

power against the domination of evil, symbolizes the power that struggles to go beyond tragic suffering to authentic healing.

Stoeber also argues that the compassionate love of God culminates in and has its source in the death and life of the Divine, in the Passion of God.²¹³

Accordingly, the God of Jesus Christ is a compassionate God who has the ability to feel the other's pain and suffering. The cross is the symbol of God's compassionate love and remains the symbol of love that concerns itself for the welfare of the other. The cross, as the event of God's love, is the theme of God's loving solidarity with the suffering world. A compassionate love is a love that suffers in solidarity along with those who suffer. God's compassion one way or another leads us to suffer. It demands solidarity.

Stoeber suggests that for some Christian mystics, the theme of suffering can be directly related to spiritual experiences of divine presence and consolation through which one identifies one's own anguish with the suffering of Jesus. In regards to the process of healing power in connection with the suffering of Jesus, Stoeber says:

There is a profound healing power that some spiritually minded Christians become aware of mystically—a consciousness arising from deep in one's heart of the very presence of Christ's own pained appreciation of our suffering, indeed of all human suffering. . . . It is a consciousness of Jesus' deep sorrow for one's own heartache, which inexplicably consoles one in a radically healing way. It is not simply an awareness of Jesus' suffering, but rather a heartfelt appreciation of his compassionate suffering for us and with us. . . . This awareness quietly moves the sufferer into a profound and mysterious healing grief of self and gives her the feeling and knowledge that she does not suffer alone, that God is willing to die for and with her—

²¹³ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 48.

that Christ is present most intimately in her pain, that Christ is taking her gently through her pain.²¹⁴

Stoeber refers to mystics who focus their spirituality on the theme of compassion for the suffering of Jesus, such as Julian of Norwich, Ignatius of Loyola, and Meister Eckhart. The solace that comes from identification with Jesus' compassionate suffering is profound. Namely, when this consolation is associated with the awareness of the suffering of Christ, it can be enlarged into a much more actively compassionate stance towards other human beings and the natural world.²¹⁵

Our Christian response to suffering and evil is directly connected to our understanding of God. Some contemporary theologians conceive of God's power as God's compassion, which can help one find the meaning of God in relation to human suffering. Drawing on a revised concept of power from process theology and from feminist theologian, Rita Brock's concept of "erotic power,"²¹⁶ Tyron Inbody reinterprets God's power in terms of relationality and communality. The relational base of power is erotic power, which, in terms of Inbody, is "the ability to get along with others and to get things done, the ability to shape each other

²¹⁴ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 50.

²¹⁵ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 50-53.

²¹⁶ See Rita Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

through the mutual empowerment of a relationship.”²¹⁷ For Inbody, erotic power is authentic power, which is the power of primal interrelatedness.

Accordingly for Inbody, the power of God no longer means the capacity to impose God’s will onto a powerless object. Through his understanding of erotic power, Inbody argues that God’s power must be interpreted and perceived in terms of God’s compassion: “God’s power is God’s identification with the suffering of the world and includes God’s vulnerability, God’s powerlessness, and God’s compassion. God’s power is the power of resurrection and transformation, which brings new life out of the suffering and evil of the world.”²¹⁸ In this view, God’s power engages another free center of power through compassion and alleviates, persuades, and reconstructs without imposing or controlling through force, which is possible because of God’s identification with suffering and the transformation of creation in terms of the resurrection. For Inbody, this view of divine power is the only authentic response to suffering and evil in the world.

In line with Inbody, Soelle also argues against Christianity’s conception “of God as a powerful, indeed as an all-powerful, father.”²¹⁹ Soelle cannot accept the concept of an almighty God after the reality of the holocaust. Soelle proposes that the God of Jesus is a God who challenges the concept of absolute power attributed

²¹⁷ Tyron Inbody, *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 136.

²¹⁸ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 140.

²¹⁹ Dorothee Soelle, *The Strength of the Weak: Toward A Christian Feminist Identity*, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 97.

to God. She understands the concept of God's power as solidarity not submission, and as freedom not obedience. For Soelle, these two constituents –solidarity and freedom- are reflected in Jesus' suffering. Soelle contends that Jesus' "suffering freely borne has a cleansing, reconciling, saving power."²²⁰ In addition, Jesus' suffering concerns for the welfare of the other and thus leads us to demand solidarity with the other.

Moltmann's argument of God's suffering on the cross also proposes the question of the power of God. For Moltmann, the cross, as a critical theory of God, tells us of the nature of God that refuses to accept the traditional theistic idea of an apathetic God. Thus, God can no longer be accused of being indifferent to suffering. In Christ, God experiences vulnerability and even death "in order to heal, to liberate and to confer new life."²²¹ For him, God's power does not lie in his ability to suppress suffering, but in his embracing suffering out of love. John Swinton similarly understands that the power of God revealed in the midst of suffering and evil is "not as a triumphalistic conquering power that strives to annihilate evil, but rather as a suffering presence that transforms evil not with force and might, but with the practice of persistent, vulnerable love."²²² Farley thus concludes that the power of God is more appropriately symbolized by love than by models of

²²⁰ Dorothee Soelle, "God's Pain and Our Pain" in *The Future of Liberation Theology*, eds. Marc Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 332.

²²¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, trans. M. Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1977), 64.

²²² John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Response to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 165-166.

domination, judgment, or control. Especially for Farley, compassion, as a determinate form of love, symbolizes the struggle to transcend and redeem evil. Namely, love expresses the relational character of redemptive power that is not coercive but healing, and compassion symbolizes the continuing presence of divine love in the world as an interactive, reciprocal power.²²³

So these revisionist theologians understand the power of God as non-absolute and non-coercive. They prefer to use the paradigm of love to speak of God. God's love is described as a power or a force that is essentially interactive and incarnational. This power empowers people to actively resist evil and suffering. They all emphasize God's compassion against the traditional theistic understanding of God as an omnipotent being. These theological interpretations of God's power, as Daniel Louw contends, can "play a decisive role in a pastoral model that aims to help find meaning in suffering and confront evil."²²⁴ However, at the same time, we need carefully to deal with some theological questions about such reinterpretations of God's power. We need to look into the danger that "God's immanence is traded for God's sovereignty," owing to an overemphasis on God's identification with suffering. It is true that reinterpretations of God's power, as I mentioned above, can help to lessen "the danger of presenting God as alienated from the reality human beings encounter."²²⁵ However, we have to emphasize

²²³ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 97, 101, 111.

²²⁴ Daniel J Louw, "Fides Quaerens Spem: A Pastoral and Theological Response to Suffering and Evil" *Interpretation* (October 2003): 390.

²²⁵ Louw, "Fides Quaerens Spem," 391.

God's sovereignty—the hope that God's power will finally bring all of the creation to fulfillment of God's purpose—as well as God's immanence—the hope that God's compassionate love is deeply connected with human suffering. In this sense, I think these revisionist theologians need to secure in their theologies that God has sufficient power to support God's compassion.

If God is totally helpless or limited in His/Her power, how we could say with Inbody that “God's power is the power of resurrection and transformation, which brings new life out of the suffering and evil of the world”?²²⁶ Does not this hope require some of the traditional senses of omnipotence? The eschatological dimensions of theodicy help to provide hope and consolation to suffering people, but these aspects of hope need some sense of God's omnipotent power. I mean here that God must have sufficient power to bring all of creation to fulfillment according to God's final purpose. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore eschatological dimensions of hope as a response to human suffering. Also, in chapters III and IV, I will explore further the theological questions related to omnipotence and compassion through Julian of Norwich's theological breakthrough in her spiritual theology.

3. Destructive Suffering of People

3. A. The Nature of Destructive Suffering

Stoeber's distinction between destructive suffering and transformative, or redemptive, suffering is a useful tool for grasping the nature of destructive

²²⁶ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 140.

suffering. For Stoeber, transformative or redemptive suffering refers to experiences of suffering that contribute to a victim's overall personal or spiritual development. As Stoeber argues, these experiences can be distinguished from destructive suffering that does not involve any spiritual transformation or self-fulfillment for the victim:

There is a distinction here between (i) destructive suffering, which diminishes and hinders the person in some way or another and for which there is no transformative impetus or response in the person (but where there will, we hope, be healing or recovery) and (ii) transformative suffering – that which contributes positively to personal growth – what we might call redemptive suffering.²²⁷

For Stoeber, destructive suffering is suffering that is and always remains non-redemptive for the victim. It has no spiritual transformative power or context for the victim in question. It serves no purpose and gains nothing positive. Stoeber states that his sense of destructive suffering includes not only Simone Weil's sense of affliction and Adams' sense of horrendous evil but also lesser forms of suffering. For Stoeber, destructive suffering sometimes can be very serious and sometimes not so serious, but in all cases it never contributes to a positive context or outcome for the victim.²²⁸

Adams' discussion and analysis of the problem of evil comes from her emphasis on the victims' point of view. She insists that human beings inevitably participate in and are vulnerable to horrors. Adams thus defines horrendous evil as "evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which constitutes *prima facie*

²²⁷ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 61.

²²⁸ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 61, 116.

reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) have positive meaning for him/her on the whole."²²⁹ To be brief, Adams understands horrendous suffering or evils as things that destroy any chance at positive meaning-making in the lives of their perpetrators and victims.

In Weil's view, affliction, described as "a pulverization of the soul by the mechanical brutality of circumstances,"²³⁰ is an extreme form of suffering. Weil utilizes a stunning analogy to express the meaning of affliction. This analogy is that of a hammer hitting a nail: "Extreme affliction, which means physical pain, distress of soul, and social degradation, all together, is the nail. The point of the nail is applied to the very center of the soul, and its head is the whole of necessity throughout all space and time." This affliction is "something quite different from a divine educational method."²³¹ Accordingly, Weil believes that affliction is a radically destructive form of suffering, which is described as simultaneously including physical, psychological, and social suffering that is unjustified.

Stoeber recognizes that it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish specific destructive suffering from transformative or redemptive suffering when we are considering the composite context of human experience and spiritual growth. He points out that some people can respond positively to certain cases of very destructive suffering, although it might take much time to discern and realize the

²²⁹ Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 26.

²³⁰ Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," in *Simone Weil*, selected and introduced by Eric O. Springsted, Modern Spiritual Master Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 65.

²³¹ Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," 53-54.

positive effects of certain radical suffering.²³² Although Stoeber admits that some apparently destructive experiences can actually be transformative, he contends that this is often not the case. When destructive suffering does occur, it is always ultimately destructive and non-redemptive for the victims. However, Stoeber argues that we can also see how destructive suffering may have a positive value for others in three ways: First, he indicates that witnessing compassionately the destructive suffering of others can generate “profound emotional states and moral attitudes,” including a sense of empathy and selflessness. Second, he indicates that the sheer possibility of such suffering adds to “our appreciation and passion for life-experience that would not otherwise obtain.” Third, he insists that the possibility of destructive suffering is required in order to secure the importance of wide-ranging freedom and human dignity in the spiritual transformation of humanity. The point of this defense is that destructive suffering “plays a role in inducing, intensifying, and expanding the human capacity to love for those who must bear witness and respond to its reality in others.”²³³

However, Stoeber simultaneously recognizes that “there is always the danger of losing sight of the victims in the clouds of qualifying theological abstractions.”²³⁴ This recognition is in line with the beliefs of some critics that theoretical theodicy is immoral because it neglects the victims of destructive suffering in trying to explain the logical systematization of God and evil. It is true

²³² Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 61-62.

²³³ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 71-72.

²³⁴ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 72.

that God might be able to bring some good out of destructive suffering, but if it is truly severely destructive, it remains a great evil without a transformative aspect for its victims. Accordingly, Stoeber contends that the destructive suffering we experience in some form or another “needs to be stressed in discussions regarding the relative merits or deficiencies of theodicy.”²³⁵

Traditionally, classical theism tended to correlate much of our suffering with sin and its consequences. Some contemporary theologians have rejected this punishment theme of theodicy in light of the question of apparently undeserved and radical suffering. Extremely destructive suffering cannot plausibly be understood as just punishment. Inbody thus argues that Christian theology should make room for a notion of a tragic flaw within creation. Inbody firmly believes that “Tragedy, or at least a tragic element in the creation, should play a significant role in an adequate Christian interpretation of suffering and evil.”²³⁶

Rosemary Radford Reuther similarly argues that the limits of finitude are not our fault and must be separated from sin. She contends that “Within the bounds of finitude and mortality, there is certainly much missed plenitude that is outside our control or decision-making; that is tragic, but is not sin.”²³⁷ Elements of tragedy and elements of sin are all intertwined in our world because they are life processes, which, as unavoidable parts of life, are not only competitive,

²³⁵ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 62.

²³⁶ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 131.

²³⁷ Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 141.

destructive, and tragic but also cooperative, constructive, and comic. Exploring the notion of “horror” in conjunction with sin and tragedy, Adams understands even horror to be built into the conditions of embodied existence; it is logically entailed in creation. Adams argues that while horror is at the root of human tragedy, sin is thought of as the disease from which humanity must be delivered in order to be reconciled with God.²³⁸ Thus, Adams interprets sin as merely symptomatic of the deeper problem of our participation in horrors. For her, sin is a consequence, rather than a first cause, of a horror-imbued creation.

Farley also argues that human beings are inevitably subject to suffering because the world is tragically structured. In this structure, we can say that someone who is suffering is not always guilty of any misdeed; some suffering results from the frailty of finitude. Farley accordingly insists that there is a kind of evil that dehumanizes to such an extent that it cannot be traced to punishment, or to aesthetic harmony, or to pedagogy, or to eschatological correction as its justification. Radical suffering, what Stoeber has called extremely destructive suffering, such as cases of child abuse and horrible experiences in death camps, cannot be understood as something deserved by anyone. Radical suffering destroys one’s basic human dignity, and thus “penetrates through the whole person and leaves only a dehumanized rag of a self behind.”²³⁹ Thus, Farley concludes:

²³⁸ Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 32.

²³⁹ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 59.

Radical suffering defines the human being as a victim or sufferer, so she (or he) becomes a deformed creature whose *habitus* is suffering. All experience is absorbed into suffering and the sufferer is impaled upon her pain...Radical suffering is the incurable wound of despair that annihilates the future, severs relationship, and withholds from suffering any possible meaning.²⁴⁰

Theologians are struggling to rethink issues of theodicy in light of destructive suffering and many Christians are faced eventually with the apparent disconnection between experiences of suffering and the paradigm of sin. A traditional theistic worldview firmly understands that all the evils of humanity are finally a consequence of sin and the punishment for sin. Accordingly, human suffering results from sin and guilt and their consequences. In such a worldview, as Stoeber asserts, “Destructive suffering is construed as justified punishment, directly for personal sin or indirectly for original sin.”²⁴¹ Accordingly, it is natural that the theme of retributive punishment in traditional Christian theodicy has tended toward a dreadful neglect of the innocent victims of destructive suffering. In addition, this traditional theistic understanding of suffering utterly fails to respond compassionately to victims of destructive suffering. Critics of theoretical theodicy are right to question the moral propriety of such themes of theodicy.

3. B. Socio-Political Dimension of Destructive Suffering

Here, I will sketch some socio-political dimension of destructive suffering by focusing on the notion of *han* in Korean theology, namely, the theology of the

²⁴⁰ Farley, *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion*, 58.

²⁴¹ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 76.

suffering and hopelessness of the oppressed. Arguing that we have moved beyond fault alone to finitude in our account of some suffering and evil with the concept of radical suffering and tragedy, Inbody insists that the Minjung conception of “han” should be considered “one of the most suggestive efforts to bridge the gap between the notions of sin and tragedy as they relate to suffering.”²⁴²

In terms of its etymology, “han” is a psychological word. It is a term that signifies the feeling of suffering of a person that has been repressed either by himself or herself or through the oppression of others. According to Nam-Dong Suh, such a feeling of helpless suffering and oppression is at the heart of the biography of the individual Korean person. This feeling of han, the suffering and hopelessness of the oppressed, is a feeling in the collective social biography of the oppressed minjung of Korea.²⁴³ Accordingly, the feeling of han is not just an individual feeling of repression or a sickness that can be cured by psychotherapy. This is a collective feeling of the oppressed. Suh argues that “Han is an accumulation of suppressed and condensed experiences of oppression. Thus

²⁴² Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 133-134.

²⁴³ Kwang-Sun David, Suh, “A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation,” in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, edited by CTC-CCA (N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), 24-25. Minjung theologians emphasize that the Korean people have historically accumulated han during long periods of persecution and suffering from within and without. They have been psychologically distressed and physically oppressed by feudalistic Yangban (aristocrats), Japanese military rule, the Korean War, domestic tyranny, and the lingering threat of North Korean Communism. Especially, under Confucianism’s strict imposition of laws and customs discriminating against women, women are most associated with “Han”. See Nam-Dong Suh, “Towards a Theology of Han” in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*, edited by CTC-CCA, (N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), 58-59.

accumulated han is inherited and transmitted, boiling in the blood of the people, which is also defined as the emotional core of anti-regime action.”²⁴⁴

The primary interpretation of han as it relates to suffering is provided by Andrew Sung Park.²⁴⁵ He argues that Christian theology has focused more on the discussion of sin and suffering and on the evil perpetrator, who is thereby guilty of sin, rather than on the victims of sin. Furthermore, the Christian doctrine of sin has addressed the oppressors’ need for forgiveness but has ignored oppressed people’s need for justice and healing.²⁴⁶ In Park’s view, han complements sin by helping us understand human suffering, because han has broadened the concept of sin to include an element of tragedy in the suffering of the oppressed throughout history.

The notion of han suggests our need to overcome the doctrine of sin’s one-dimensional approach to the problems of evil and suffering. Park explains the notion of han delicately, giving a special relation to the notion of sin and evil as follows:

Where sin is committed, han arises as its corollary. The victims of sin develop the deep agonizing pain of han. They bear excruciating agony and humiliation caused by oppression, exploitation, abuse, mistreatment, and violation. . . . Sin causes han, and han produces sin. Sin is of oppressors; han is of the oppressed. The sin of oppressors may cause a chain reaction via the han of the oppressed. Sometimes has causes han. Furthermore, unattended or unhealed han gives rise to evil. This evil can regenerate han

²⁴⁴ Nam-Dong Suh, “Towards a Theology of Han,” 64.

²⁴⁵ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), and “Theology of Han (the Abyss of Pain),” *Quarterly Review* (Spring 1989): 48-62.

²⁴⁶ Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 16.

and sin. Also, sin and han collaborate to engender evil. They overlap in many tragic areas of life.²⁴⁷

Inbody contends that Park informs us that sin alone is an inadequate concept to account for the abysmal depth of human pain and suffering.²⁴⁸ When approached from the pain of the victim of sin, instead of the guilt of the sinner, sin becomes han. The victim experiences feelings of deep bitterness and helplessness. Thus, Park defines han as “the critical wound of the heart generated by unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by social, political, economic, and cultural repression.”²⁴⁹ Instead of the sinner standing before God as a sinner, han places the suffering of the victims of sin in the context of the tragedies of their lives as victims of sin. Although Park does not view the notion of han in the structures of individuals, groups, or even nature as a tragic flaw in creation itself, he transcends the traditional concept of sin and the guilt mechanism as the only explanation of evil and suffering in the world. In other words, Park’s notion of han can provide an alternative theological approach to understanding victims of destructive suffering, freeing people from the unilateral interpretation of the sin-penalty scheme.

3. C. Responses to Destructive Suffering

This section explores theological responses to destructive suffering by focusing on explanations referencing the spiritual power of the Cross and

²⁴⁷ Park, *From Hurt to Healing*, 16.

²⁴⁸ Inbody, *The Transforming God*, 134.

²⁴⁹ Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 10.

eschatological dimension. Adams builds a Christology as a theological response to horrendous evils on the idea that Jesus Christ came not to save us from our sins, but to rescue us from the horrors of this world. Specifically, Adams depicts Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of Divine love, as “the horror defeater,” affirming that the One who participated in the horrors of human beings defeats their *prima facie* “life-ruining powers.”²⁵⁰ Adams wants to confirm that Jesus Christ as “the horror defeater” provides consolation and definitive healing to people who are undergoing destructive suffering with the confidence of the horror-participant’s final status in an unending relationship of eventual beatific intimacy with God.

From this assertion, Adams interprets the Incarnation as the divine solidarity that enables God to be present to us during our subjection to horror. For her, incarnation is understood as God’s creative desire for the “hypostatic union” with the creation, “whether or not rational creatures sinned.”²⁵¹ Namely, for Adams, incarnation is understood as Divine solidarity with us in horror-participation and expressed as God’s unitive desire for intimate personal relationship with people rather than as a corrective for sin. In the Crucifixion, God identified with all human beings who participate in horrors, not just victims, but perpetrators too. Hence, participation in horrors becomes a secure point of identification with the crucified God. Sacrifice on the Cross remains a healing presence through the real presence of Christ’s body at the Eucharistic table. Adams says, “Christ’s self-presentation as

²⁵⁰ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40.

²⁵¹ Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 174-175.

food bears witness to God-with-us providing for us in the midst of our continuing vulnerabilities.”²⁵² In sum, we recognize that, for Adams, God’s identification with the human participants in horrors through the Cross of Jesus Christ provides a healing power to people who are undergoing destructive suffering by inviting them into an everlasting relationship of love with God.

Related to this line of thinking, Weil writes of affliction—extreme physical, psychological, and social suffering that cannot be justified. Just as Christ’s body and soul were accursed when hanging on the cross, an afflicted person feels himself or herself accursed. For Weil, “The cross of Christ is the only source of light that is bright enough to illumine affliction.”²⁵³ In Weil’s view, even if concealed, the cross is present in any age where there is affliction, and it is only the contemplation of Christ’s Cross that enables us to endure real affliction. For Weil, the crucifixion denotes the infinite distance between God and God and the incomparable agony. At the same time, it connotes the marvel of love. Individuals beset by affliction are “at the foot of the cross, almost at the greatest possible distance from God.”²⁵⁴ There is no greater good on earth than the privilege of sharing in this distance between the Son and his Father. Weil’s observation is very insightful: “God can never be perfectly present to us here below on account of our flesh. But he can be almost perfectly absent from us in extreme affliction. For us, on earth, this is the only possibility of perfection. That is why the Cross is our only

²⁵² Adams, *Christ and Horrors*, 310.

²⁵³ Weil, “The Love of God and Affliction,” 66-67.

²⁵⁴ Weil, “The Love of God and Affliction,” 47.

hope.”²⁵⁵ We can say that Weil’s insight into God’s absence signifies an undeniable understanding of God’s presence. As long as we experience the joy of God’s presence in Christ, we can endure the pain of God’s absence in our affliction.

After stating the essential link between the Cross and affliction, Weil states the meaning of the Cross for people who have been gripped by affliction:

Wherever there is affliction there is the Cross. ...Affliction without the Cross is hell, and God has not placed hell upon the earth. ... [The Cross] is the only one thing that enables us to accept real affliction.... That one thing suffices. ... Whoever loves Christ and thinks of him on the Cross should feel a relief when gripped by affliction.²⁵⁶

Weil stresses that Christ’s redemptive power is available to everyone who has been afflicted. Christ’s suffering on behalf of humanity did not eliminate their afflictions. Instead, through the affliction of Christ, a person is able to begin to find healing from her or his suffering. Weil asserts that it is Christ who enables God’s redemptive power to overcome the destructive effects of affliction in such a way that the power of the Cross transcends time. The spiritual consolatory power of the Cross is available to afflicted people when the personal experience of the Cross, which she calls the dark night of the soul, is merged into the abandonment Jesus felt on the Cross. Weil’s theme of the affliction of Christ is directly related to the religious experience of divine consolation and presence, which comes when one identifies one’s own anguish with the suffering of Jesus. Regarding the process of healing power in connection with the suffering of Jesus, I have already mentioned

²⁵⁵ Weil, “The Love of God and Affliction,” 49.

²⁵⁶ Weil, “The Love of God and Affliction,” 67.

in the previous section Stoeber's clarification of some Christian mystics' accounts of the theme of compassion of Jesus.

John Hick and Stoeber also stress eschatological dimensions in responding to destructive suffering. Hick contends that by the "soul-making" process of human beings moving toward eschatological perfection, the epistemic distance that separates human beings from God is overcome and they transform in likeness to God. A central and indispensable aspect of Hick's theodicy is his defense of the belief in an afterlife for all humans. For Hick, afterlife realities are not compensation for earthly suffering; they are an opportunity for continued spiritual growth. Pointing to the unanswered problem of horrendous evil, Hick suggests that living with that very mystery, which is "impenetrable to the rationalizing human mind," is itself a necessary aspect of the soul-making process.²⁵⁷ As a response to the problem of horrendous evil, Hick seems compelled to broaden the context of the problem by including the eschatological dimension. Hick says, "The person-making process begins for each individual at his birth, making much or little progress as the case may be in this life, and continues in another life...until it eventually reaches its completion in the infinite good of the common life of humanity within the life of God."²⁵⁸ Hick bases his theodicy on the assumption that a person will continue in an afterlife to deepen his or her relationship with God, until the person finally reaches a state of spiritual perfection. He argues: "If this life

²⁵⁷ John Hick. *Evil and the God of Love* (New York & Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 335, 386.

²⁵⁸ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 374.

is all, the sufferings and injustices that afflict so many so arbitrarily would mean that God is not good, or that we are not part of a friendly universe. From any religious point of view, then, there must be further life beyond this.”²⁵⁹

So Hick supposes an intermediate afterlife state that allows for continued moral and spiritual maturing towards an eventual perfection of human being. This intermediate state, however, for Hick, is different from the purgatory of the Catholic tradition because he thinks there is no room for continuing moral and spiritual growth in the traditional concept of purgatory. Hick is also open to the possibility of reincarnation, especially in his later writings. At the same time, Hick emphasizes the significance of our present lives because he thinks that the essence of our present selves will continue in a succession of afterlife states the same spiritual project in movement towards an eventual completion.²⁶⁰

Stoeber develops this line of thinking, contending that Christian theology requires the postulation of an afterlife “both for a future afterlife healing of the effects of destructive suffering and further transformative opportunities in the human movement towards the spiritual ideal.”²⁶¹ Stoeber suggests that a belief in a compassionate and omnipotent God requires afterlife postulations such as purgatory or rebirth as possible means for healing and recovery from destructive suffering and of continuing the process towards redemption. In terms of Stoeber’s

²⁵⁹ John Hick, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience and the Transcendent* (New York and Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 198.

²⁶⁰ Hick, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science*, 198, 200.

²⁶¹ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 81-82.

analysis, these possibilities entail the only genuinely compassionate responses to those who undergo destructive suffering, in contrast to responses of apathy or distorted empathy towards suffering, in providing opportunities for healing and redemption. Such afterlife speculation suggests that despite our experience of the evils of destructive suffering, divine love can be defended in the face of the harsh reality of destructive suffering, and hopes that good will eventually prevail over evil.

For Stoeber, the theme of divine love or compassion is crucial to effective theodicy. The speculation regarding purgatory and rebirth as responses to destructive suffering is grounded in compassionate love, which makes this afterlife condition appropriate for healing and continued spiritual integration and transformation. Stoeber argues that such a divine-compassion approach to suffering not only “differs from that of some Christians who deliberately or inadvertently take apathetic, sadistic, or masochistic stances towards suffering” but also is “understood in a way that is consistent with and fulfills the conception of a God of infinite love and power.”²⁶² In this way, afterlife beliefs allow us to hope for healing and recovery from the effects of destructive suffering and the ultimate spiritual redemption of all humanity, without denying the reality of destructive suffering.

²⁶² Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 101.

4. Conclusion

In Chapter II, I examined three significant issues in contemporary theodicy that arise from the debate and discussion between theoretical and practical theodicy, triggered by the criticisms of theoretical theodicy by pastoral theodicians and the responses of theoretical theodicy. The first issue related to the question about the theoretical context for a practical theodicy. In reference to the thought of O'Connor, Adams, Whitney, and Stoeber, I focused on the clarification of the problem of abandoning theoretical theodicy. I argued that theoretical theodicies in some contexts are required because of the fact that they provide a reasoned defense to the existential-ministerial problems of evil and suffering. Theoretical theodicies can provide not only consolation through explanation but also the grounds for hope for the healing and redemption of victims of evil and suffering in the world. I argue that theoretical theodicy needs to be reclaimed in order to properly support pastoral concerns. Effective theodicy thus needs an effective integration of theoretical and practical theodicy.

A second issue pertained to the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. Many responses to this question focus on the theological and practical meaning of the compassion of God because the meaning of compassion is grasped as the possibility of healing and hope. They find the essential nature of God in God's active compassion in responding to human suffering. In reference especially to God's compassion revealed in the Cross of Jesus Christ, I clarified that Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of the compassionate and liberating action of God, provides indications for understanding how divine compassion is present to history in special relation to human suffering. Jesus' suffering with us is the main

characteristic of divine compassion in relation to human suffering, which provides consolation and brings healing through the deep love of God. In addition, through the open ended questions of the passibility/impassibility of God and on the reinterpretation of God's omnipotence, we recognize that not only are there still unresolved tricky problems but also there is the question of whether a reduced sense of divine power could support genuine divine compassion.

A third issue involved the question of the destructive suffering experienced by people. To begin, I clarified the definitions of destructive suffering in contrast to redemptive or transformative suffering. I also explored the socio-political dimension of destructive suffering by specifically focusing on the concept of *han* in Korean theology, the theology for the suffering and hopelessness of the oppressed. Finally, as examples of the possible role of religious experience in responding to the problem of destructive suffering, I discussed the ideas of Adams and Weil, which can be related to the theme of divine compassion as it was developed in the second issue—the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. They provide specific views of Christology and of spiritual experiences of Christ which point to the possible healing and recovery from the effects of destructive suffering. I also introduced eschatological responses of Hick and Stoeber to destructive suffering. They provide coherent proposals of afterlife possibilities which hope that opportunities for redemption might continue and that Divine love and goodness will eventually prevail over evil, despite the reality of destructive suffering.

In the next chapters, I will clarify and analyze how certain themes in the spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich have positive implications for these major

issues in contemporary theodicy that I have developed in this chapter. It will explore how certain themes in Julian's spiritual theology might provide positive contributions to the integration of theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy, show how Julian's theme of divine love might provide theological and pastoral significance in responding to the contemporary question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering, and demonstrate how Julian's spiritual theology provides positive contributions to the contemporary theodical problem of destructive suffering, with her emphasis on Christological and eschatological approaches to that issue.

Chapter 3

The Contributions of Julian of Norwich to Issues in Contemporary Theodicy:

The Spiritual Theology of Julian of Norwich as a Resource for Theodicy I

Julian of Norwich (c.1342-c.1416) was an anchoress of Norwich, England. She is best known for the sixteen “showings” or revelations of God’s love which she received during a serious illness. She writes of having received her revelations on May 13, 1373. During her vision, Julian pondered the problem of sin and suffering. She wanted to understand how a loving God could be reconciled with human suffering. Essentially and existentially, Julian struggled with the question of theodicy. To Julian, the existential, experiential religious question of a loving God was of prime importance. In her *Showings*, Julian begins with experience, describes the emotional confusions and intellectual perplexities, and seeks a resolution within the larger framework of Christian doctrine. In this respect, the *Showings* exemplifies a peculiar version of theodicy whose intellectual arguments serve a primarily pastoral purpose. Julian’s integration of mystical experience into her theological reflections and, as a result of this, her specific themes of spiritual theology, can lead us to comparative dialogue with the significant issues in modern theodicy. Hence, this thesis explores Julian’s spiritual theology as a resource for contemporary theodicy, focusing on the clarification and analysis of how certain themes in her spiritual theology have a positive bearing on significant issues in theodicy that arise from the current debate between theoretical and pastoral theodicy, as I illustrated these in chapter 2.

In this chapter, I will explore several of Julian's most prominent themes: the Fall, sin, and human nature; the nature of the body and evil; and images of God and divine compassion. These themes are found throughout her spiritual theology and might have a positive impact on issues in contemporary theodicy. All of these themes are Julian's attempt to give theoretical context to support her pastoral concerns, and the theme on the images of God and divine compassion relates especially to the contemporary issue on the nature of God in relation to human suffering. I will begin with Julian's understanding of the Fall, sin and human nature, which show that her approach to the problem of evil is unique in medieval, orthodox retributive theodicy. Next, I will examine Julian's constructive view of the nature of the body and evil – which is significantly different from the classical/medieval worldview – by clarifying her understanding of interconnected notions of the body, sin and gender. Lastly, I will turn to Julian's theology of the motherhood of God as a vital response to the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. At the same time, I will discuss Julian's contribution to the recent debate on divine compassion and human suffering by explaining her spiritual theology of divine compassion and devotion to the suffering of the crucified Christ.

1. The Fall, Sin and Human Nature

1. A. The Problem of the Fall and Sin

Through Julian's understanding of the notions of the fall and sin, this section discloses the nature of God in special relation to the problem of human sin and suffering, by clarifying her unique approach to the problem of evil, which is in

stark contrast to medieval, orthodox retributive theodicy. The predominant message in Julian's revelations is that of God's unconditional love. Julian, however, immediately experiences the full tension between her powerful consciousness of the overwhelming love of God and her personal knowledge of sin. The theological question of sin for Julian arises first from her vision of God who is present in all things. After carefully contemplating, she formulates a question:

And after this I saw God in an instant of time, that is to say in my understanding, by which vision I saw that he is present in all things. I contemplated it carefully, seeing and recognizing through it that he does everything which is done. What is sin? For I saw truly that God does everything, however small it may be, and that nothing is done by chance, but all by God's prescient wisdom.²⁶³

In other words, if all things and events come from God's goodness and are inseparable from God, how can there be sin? This apparent tension, in the words of Joan Nuth, shows that "she herself had experienced some of the fearful fascination that accompanied reflection on the meaning of sin in her day."²⁶⁴ Since God does not sin, and since sin was not shown in her mystical vision, Julian concludes that "sin is no deed": "For he [God] is at the center of everything, and he does everything. And I was certain that he does no sin; and here I was certain that sin is

²⁶³ Julian of Norwich, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, trans. Edmund College, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J., Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 11. 197. This book will be referred to hereafter as *Showings*. The first number refers to the chapter number and the second number, the page number.

²⁶⁴ Joan Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 118.

no deed, for all this sin was not shown to me.”²⁶⁵ In her mystical vision Julian sees all things in God, but she does not see sin, which leads her to conclude that sin, as the absence of good, is nothing, or at least eventually will be nothing.

It is, however, a mistake to think that Julian does not take sin seriously. Julian is acutely aware of how much human beings suffer from sin. For Julian, suffering is the most significant aspect of sin:

Sin is the sharpest scourge with which any chosen soul can be struck, which scourge belabors man or woman, and breaks a man and purges him in his own sight so much that at times he thinks himself that he is not fit for anything but as it were to sink into hell.²⁶⁶

Nuth explains that in Julian’s mind, humanity is trapped by the hurt and injuries caused by sin. Accordingly, as one loses the strength and wisdom associated with the human soul one becomes “no longer able to see God or the self as they truly are.” In addition, human beings not only are “afflicted by constant temptation to personal sin” but also become so “preoccupied with bodily suffering that one cannot concentrate on one’s relationship with God.”²⁶⁷ Nuth insists that Julian considers despair as the most deadly and destructive of sins: “given [Julian’s] emphasis upon God’s love, it is logical that the most heinous sin in her eyes should be despair, which essentially denies God’s love.”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 11. 197-198.

²⁶⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 39. 244.

²⁶⁷ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 122-124.

²⁶⁸ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 128.

Sin for Julian is not only the cause of Jesus' suffering but also the cause of all human suffering. For Julian, sin is at the core of multifarious problems of evil and suffering. Julian does not say that there is no sin but that sin does not participate in substantial being. Making this clearer, Julian speculates about the ultimate condition of sin:

But I did not see sin, for I believe that it has no kind of substance, no share in being, nor can it be recognized except by the pain caused by it. And it seems to me that this pain is something for a time, for it purges and makes us know ourselves and ask for mercy; for the Passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this, and that is his blessed will. And because of the tender love which our good Lord has for all who will be saved, he comforts readily and sweetly, meaning this: It is true that sin is the cause of all this pain, but all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well.²⁶⁹

Grace Jantzen understands this comment as “a statement about the ontological status of sin: it is a denial of sin as an ultimate and irremediable fact about the world, a rejection of the notion that sin can never be overcome.”²⁷⁰ Deeply aware of human being's severe suffering and pain resulting from sin, Julian “wondered why, through the great prescient wisdom of God, the beginning of sin was not prevented.” This question is answered directly: “Sin is necessary, but all will be well. And all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well.”²⁷¹ Why was it necessary? She points to “an exalted and wonderful mystery hidden in God which

²⁶⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 27. 225.

²⁷⁰ Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 181.

²⁷¹ Julian, *Showings*, 27. 224-225.

God will make plain and we shall know in heaven.”²⁷² This, however, does not really answer her question.

In addition, in Revelation Fourteen, looking specifically at how God regards sinners, Julian is astonished not to see any wrath in God. She wrestles with the apparent contradiction: Julian sees the judgment from God’s justice, but “I saw him assign to us no kind of blame.” Julian is perplexed because she thinks the judgment of Holy Church had understood that “sinners sometimes deserve blame and wrath.” She, however, “could not see these two in God.”²⁷³ Julian could not reconcile her vision that there is no wrath in God with the traditional teaching of the church that those who permanently refuse God’s love will be condemned to hell. God’s answer to this dilemma is given to her by the understanding of the parable of “the lord and the servant.” According to Nuth, this parable not only “stands out in stark contrast to the general attitude towards sin characteristic of the latter fourteenth century” but also makes it possible for her to “develop her theology of the trinity and of the motherhood of God,” both of which immediately follow the parable in the Long Text.²⁷⁴ Julian’s parable of the lord and the servant is the key point to comprehend the questions of why God’s judgment does not show wrath for blaming human sins, how sin can be beneficial, and why “all will be well” despite the reality of sin and suffering.

²⁷² Julian, *Showings*, 27. 226.

²⁷³ Julian, *Showings*, 45. 257.

²⁷⁴ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 28, 119.

In the parable, Julian sees a great lord sitting with dignity and a servant waiting respectfully before him, ready to do his will. The lord looks at his servant lovingly, and sends him on a mission. The servant does enthusiastically his lord's will with anxiety and love, but falls immediately into a ditch and is so badly injured that he cannot get up or help himself in any way. His greatest hurt was "lack of consolation, for he could not turn his face to look on his loving lord." He was plagued by the distress of his situation. However, Julian is marveled that the servant could suffer all this so meekly. She watches carefully the servant to know if she can "detect any fault in him, or if the lord would impute to him any kind of blame," but she cannot. In fact, the servant's good will and his great longing were the only cause of his fall. The servant is still as eager to do the lord's will as he had been when he was standing before his lord, even though he is now unable to do so. In the meantime, the lord continues to consider the servant most tenderly, "with a double aspect." Outwardly, the lord looks upon the servant "very meekly and mildly, with great compassion and pity." Inwardly, Julian sees the lord rejoicing over "the honourable rest and nobility" to which he would and must bring his servant through his plentiful grace. Indeed, the courteous lord demands that his servant should be "rewarded for ever, above what he would have been if he had not fallen." All the suffering caused by his falling will be transformed into "high, surpassing honor and endless bliss."²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 51. 267-269.

In this story, the lord represents God and the servant represents Adam, who stands for all human beings and their failing. However, this understanding does not solve the dilemma between human sins that deserve punishment and the revelation that there is no wrath in God. Julian paid intense attention to the detailed description of the lord and the servant. A theological breakthrough came when Julian realized that not only does the servant represent Adam; he also represents Christ, the true Adam. This realization that the servant represents both Adam and Christ came first when Julian understood the duality of the lord's attitude to the servant's fall: outwardly compassionate, and inwardly joyful. Julian says, "Part was compassion and pity, part was joy and bliss.... The compassion and the pity of the Father were for Adam, who is his most beloved creature. The joy and the bliss were for the falling of his dearly beloved Son, who is equal with the Father."²⁷⁶ This identification of Adam with Christ "brings Julian to a resolution of part of her dilemma about the blame that seems to attach to sin."²⁷⁷

Julian understands that the fall of the servant represents simultaneously both the fall of the Son of God into the human condition and the fall of humanity into sin and death. When Adam and all humanity fell into sin and thus into hell, the Son of God also "fell" into the womb of the virgin in order to absolve Adam from blame and save him from hell. Julian links Adam and Jesus in a most intimate manner:

²⁷⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 51. 271.

²⁷⁷ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 197.

When Adam fell, God's Son fell; because of the true union which was made in heaven, God's Son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all mankind. Adam fell from life to death, into the valley of this wretched world, and after that into hell. God's Son fell with Adam, into the valley of the womb of the maiden who was the fairest daughter of Adam, and that was to excuse Adam from blame in heaven and on earth; and powerfully he brought him out of hell.²⁷⁸

Through the mysterious vision of Christ falling with Adam, Julian comes to assert the reality of the ontological connections between Adam and Christ. In this identification Julian points towards a resolution of her nagging question about why there is no wrath in God, and why no blame is ascribed to humanity by God.

Abram Engen contends that for Julian, the resolution is “a matter of perspective—namely, God's.”²⁷⁹ Claiming that in the higher judgment, “we have God assigning no blame and the godly will undamaged by the Fall,” and in the lower judgment “we find Holy Church assigning blame and a blindness that both causes and results from the Fall,” Engen contends that in terms of Julian's resolution, the lower judgment of the Church disappears when it is perceived through the higher judgment of God. Likewise, blindness and blaming caused by the Fall disappear when perceived through the godly will.²⁸⁰ In a similar vein, Paula Barker contends that Julian is able to affirm that both the teaching of the Church and the revelation of divine love are true on different levels of reality from

²⁷⁸ Julian, *Showings*, 51. 274-275.

²⁷⁹ Abram Van Engen, “Shifting Perspectives: Sin and Salvation in Julian's A Revelation of Love,” *Literature and Theology*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (March 2009): 4.

²⁸⁰ Engen, “Shifting Perspectives,” 7.

her insight that the contradiction can be reconciled from the distinction between divine and human perspectives. Barker says,

Sin, on the human plane, is a present, painful experience that is puzzlingly inconsistent with faith in the omnipotence, providence and love of God. When it is, however, viewed from the divine perspective, sin has no place; it has no being . . . She [Julian] does not deny that sin is real in human experience. What she denies is that it has any eternal reality. It has no part in God, who is the source of existence. Since sin has no being in eternity, it cannot thwart God's salvific plans.²⁸¹

We have seen that Julian's theology of sin and redemption tells us that the church's lower judgment of blame will finally be replaced by God's higher judgment of blamelessness. Julian's theology tells us that the current experience of God's wrath enables a deeper knowledge of God's love. Julian reveals that sin allows us to know our wretchedness, teaches humility and meekness, and finally draws us closer to the wonderful love of God:

If we did not fall, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we are in ourselves, nor, too, should we know so completely the wonderful love of our Creator. . . . And by the experience of this falling we shall have a great and marvellous knowledge of love in God without end; for enduring and marvellous is that love which cannot and will not be broken because of offences. . . . Another is the humility and meekness which we shall obtain by the sight of our fall, for by that we shall be raised high in heaven, to which raising we might never have come without that meekness.²⁸²

The Church's purpose, in Julian's understanding, is to illustrate human sin and blame in order to minister mercy and grace, because sin enables us to discover humility and become open to the mercy of God. We recognize that Julian talks

²⁸¹ Paula S. Datsko Barker, "The Motherhood of God in Julian of Norwich's Theology," *Downside Review* 100 (1982): 293.

²⁸² Julian, *Showings*, 61. 300.

repeatedly of human sin and never denies its experiential reality. Julian insists that we accuse ourselves, and that these accusations and the feelings of guilt and punishment are necessary for a greater and deeper union with God. This is the meaning of Julian's saying, "Sin is necessary, but all will be well."²⁸³ For Julian, sin is not just necessary; it is beneficial. It is, as Denys Turner says, "needed as part of the plot."²⁸⁴

Drawing from Julian's understanding of the Fall and sin, especially from her theological breakthrough through the reflections on the parable of the lord and the servant, Denise Baker contends that Julian raises questions about orthodox medieval solutions to the problem of evil, that had originally been proposed by Augustine. Baker sums up the premise of Augustinian theodicy:

The premises of Augustine's solution to the problem of evil inform the medieval ideology of sin. These assertions – that evil results from the free choice of individuals who inherit a propensity to sin and that sinners must suffer the consequences of God's wrath – are theological axioms of the Middle Ages.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Julian, *Showings*, 27. 225.

²⁸⁴ Denys Turner, "'Sin is behovely' in Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love," *Modern Theology* 20.3 (July 2004): 418. Turner explores Julian's meaning of the word, "behovely," which is translated into "necessary," by comparing it to the Latin *conveniens*. He concludes: "In a world in which there is sin, in which sin is inevitable, all can be well too, and sin's inevitability is part of the picture, or if you like, part of that plot, of all manner of thing being well. And that, in the end I think, is the theological meaning of "behovely" and of *conveniens*: that sin is "behovely" means that sin is needed as part of the plot—or, if you like, that the plot needs sin. ... For it is only if we know that everything that happens, for good or ill, is part of the plot which God has scripted."

²⁸⁵ Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 68.

To Baker, this solution to the problem of evil is retributive and juridical: it is concerned with origins and based on a legalistic definition of sin that seeks to place blame and secure retribution. It blames sinners and justifies God's punishment of sinners, who freely chose to disobey God's commands. In contrast, Julian, instead of focusing on guilt and justifying God's punishment, explores the manner in which "all will be well" at the end of time. This arises from the response to her inquiry about why God has permitted sin. Julian is told that "Sin is necessary, but all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."²⁸⁶ Accordingly, Baker contends that Julian regards sin from an eschatological perspective and explores its function in the divine plan. She calls Julian's theodicy "teleological." It is contrasted by Augustinian "etiological" theodicy, which is concerned with origins of sin and suffering and thus defends God from responsibility for evil, by placing blame on sinners.²⁸⁷

Julian's teleological structure of theology stands in conspicuous contrast to the juridical paradigm of response to the problem of evil and suffering. So she is able to avoid criticisms that have been raised in contemporary theodicy against extreme retributive themes of theodicy. Julian's purpose in writing on the revelations of God's love is to comfort fellow Christians who are besieged by their guilt for sin and their fear of a wrathful God, which is conflictive with their hope in an all-embracing love of God. Thus with respect to the issue concerned with the

²⁸⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 27. 225.

²⁸⁷ Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 67-69.

question of the theoretical context for pastoral theodicy, she is quite concerned to bring an intelligible theoretical context to support her readers in pastoral ways. In the next section, as I examine Julian's theological position on human nature, I will explain how her spiritual theology is different from theologies that stress retribution, and how Julian discloses the nature of God in special relation to the context of human sin and suffering.

1. B. Human Nature

As we saw above in this chapter, for Julian the most perplexing question was why there is no blaming towards human sins and no wrath in God. Julian found the answer to the question in Christ's identification with humanity. Accordingly, here, I will develop Julian's understanding of human nature, with special attention to her unique conception of the mystical incorporation of humanity into Christ. Julian explains this mystical incorporation of humanity into God through the analogy of knitting. Andrew Sprung contends that Julian's use of "knitting" is her mode of "oneing" Christ to humanity, one that she constantly uses to "emphasize the essential likeness, nearness, oneness of divine and human kind."²⁸⁸ Patricia Donahue-White argues that Julian uses the term to "express the uniting or joining of divinity and humanity, particularly through the maternal work

²⁸⁸ Andrew Sprung, "'We nevyr shall come out if hym': Enclosure and Immanence in Julian of Norwich's Book of Showings," *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (June 1993): 51-52.

of incarnation.”²⁸⁹ In Julian’s anthropology, we are united with God in double knitting:

For our nature, which is the higher part, is joined [knit] to our nature in its creation, and God is joined [knit] to our nature, which is the lower part in taking flesh. And so in Christ our two natures are united, for the Trinity is comprehended in Christ, in whom our higher part is founded and rooted; and our lower part the second person has taken, which nature was first prepared for him.²⁹⁰

For Julian, the “higher part” of human nature is our “substance,” and the “lower part,” our “sensuality.” The “substance” and the “sensuality” are the two essential parts or features of our soul: “We are double by God’s creating, that is to say substantial and sensual.”²⁹¹ Furthermore, Julian elucidates the meaning of knitting in relation to Christ, saying that our “higher part” (“substance”) is “founded and rooted” in Christ and our “lower part” (“sensuality”) is “taken” by Christ. The “substance” of our soul is knit to God by its being founded and rooted in Christ because human substance was created at the same time when the substance of Christ’s human soul was created. The “sensuality” of our soul is knit to God because human sensuality was taken by Christ who became flesh in the world. Through this “double knitting” Christ is united with all humanity. To Julian the substance of the human soul exists with God before time, while the sensuality

²⁸⁹ Patricia Donahue-White, “Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich,” *Spiritus*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 2005), 27.

²⁹⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 57. 291.

²⁹¹ Julian, *Showings*, 58. 294.

begins only when it is “breathed into our body” in the course of time.²⁹² According to Barker, “the higher part, or substance of the soul, has been united to God since the moment when God willed to create it from nothing. The lower part, or sensual soul, is inhabited by God from the instant that the soul becomes incarnate.”²⁹³

In Julian’s anthropology, the substance of all human souls, as Nuth understands, is eternally united with God because it was “created at the same time and made one with the substance of Christ’s human soul,” which was “the one true image of God” and “the highest being created before time and eternally joined to the Logos.”²⁹⁴ In this sense “our higher part or substance is founded and rooted” in Christ. For Julian, the term “substance of the soul” is used to signify a bond, the everlasting union of the soul to God through love: “Our natural substance is now full of blessedness in God, and has been since it was made, and will be without end.”²⁹⁵ This union is eternal, permanent, and unchanging because it is due to God’s eternal love and God’s promise of ever actively preserving God’s image in the human soul, not by any effort on the part of human nature. Julian makes clear that “God is God, and our substance is a creature in God.” However, in order to emphasize the union between God and human substance, Julian makes an almost

²⁹² Julian, *Showings*, 55. 286.

²⁹³ Barker, “The Motherhood of God in Julian’s Theology,” 297.

²⁹⁴ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 111.

²⁹⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 45. 258.

pantheistic statement: “I saw no difference between God and our substance.”²⁹⁶

Julian wants to stress the fact that through God’s eternal plan, there is an unbreakable unity between human beings and God.

At the same time, Julian’s concept of sensuality is, as Engen says, “the part of human souls having to do with empirical existence. It is not the body; Julian never makes a clear split between body and soul. Rather, it incorporates the body as part of human experience.”²⁹⁷ F. C. Bauerschmidt puts it another way: “The realm of sensuality, in its isolation from our substance, has become the realm of change, sin, and suffering that characterizes our life on earth.”²⁹⁸ Julian thus says, “In our substance we are full, and in our sensuality we are lacking.” In short, human sensuality is where we experience the effects of incompleteness due to the Fall. Julian, however, says that God restores this failing and bring our sensuality to completion “by the operation of mercy and grace, plentifully flowing into us from his own natural goodness.”²⁹⁹

This restoration and fulfillment of unity between human substance and sensuality is made possible when the substance of Christ’s soul united itself to a human body in time. In essence, “the incarnation, God’s work of mercy in time, completes human nature by bringing sensuality into complete union with the soul’s

²⁹⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 54. 285-286.

²⁹⁷ Engen, “Shifting Perspectives,” 7.

²⁹⁸ F. C. Bauerschmidt, “Julian of Norwich-Incorporated,” *Modern Theology* Vol. 13, No. 1 (January 1997): 83.

²⁹⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 57. 291.

substance.”³⁰⁰ Julian says, “In the same time that God joined [knit] himself to our body in the maiden’s womb, he took our soul, which is sensual, and in taking it, having enclosed us all in himself, he united it to our substance. In this union he was perfect man.”³⁰¹ As a result of the incarnation, what Julian calls the “increase” of our nature, the completion of union between our sensuality and our substance is made possible by Christ. However, Julian reminds us that sensual human life in the world of time is gradually growing and lifted up in the eternity of God. For Julian, human sensual life is where we are drawn into the process of growth or “increasing” until we become fully Christ-like. Thus, Julian says that this increasing of human nature occurs only by a gradual process of growth “with the operation of mercy, the Holy Spirit by grace”:

All the gifts which God can give to the creature he has given to his Son Jesus for us, which gifts he, dwelling in us, has enclosed in him until the time that we are fully grown, our soul together with our body and our body together with our soul. Let either of them take help from the other, until we have grown to full stature as creative nature brings about; and then in the foundation of creative nature with the operation of mercy, the Holy Spirit by grace breathes into us gifts leading to endless life.³⁰²

In sum, for Julian the transformation of human nature is effected by the Incarnation, which unites our sensuality to our substance. Because of the unity between substance and sensuality, our old humanity can be transformed into the new humanity. It is for Julian true that God holds human beings in an eternal bond of

³⁰⁰ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 111.

³⁰¹ Julian, *Showings*, 57. 292.

³⁰² Julian, *Showings*, 55. 287.

love, and this is so strong that it can never be broken. However, we also need to recognize that Julian does not say that humans are not automatically doing what God wills. She invites us to be “partners in [God’s] good will and work,” especially through prayer, which “moves us for what it pleases him [God] to do.”³⁰³ Julian also says, “He [Christ] wants us to be his helpers, giving all our intention to him, learning his laws, observing his teaching, desiring everything to be done which he does, truly trusting in him, for I saw truly that our substance is in him.”³⁰⁴ These sayings, as Nuth contends, signify “Julian’s belief in the free cooperation of the human will with God’s grace.”³⁰⁵

We have seen in this section that Julian’s entire theology is a response to her nagging questions about the problem of why there is no guilt for human sins and no wrath in God. Julian found God’s answer to this dilemma in “Christ’s identification with humanity,” which is given by the understanding of the parable of the lord and the servant. Here, I will explore the ways in which Julian’s theological response to the problem of suffering is different from the response of the traditional theology of retribution, and the motive and purpose of developing her unique spiritual theology in that way. In so doing, I will disclose the nature of God that Julian delineates in special relation to the context of human sin.

³⁰³ Julian, *Showings*, 43. 253.

³⁰⁴ Julian, *Showings*, 57. 292.

³⁰⁵ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 116.

Julian would admit that human responses to sin such as “grief” (as a response to the pain of others caused by our sin), “shame” (as a response of violating or turning away from our essential nature), and “fear” (as a response to God’s angry actions towards us) would seem utterly appropriate if sin were treated as a matter of autonomous and deliberate rebellion on the part of people. However, Julian saw something different in her Revelation Fourteen:

I saw truly that our Lord was never angry and never will be. Because he is God, he is good, he is truth, he is love, he is peace; and his power, his wisdom, his charity and his unity do not allow him to be angry. . . . God is that goodness which cannot be angry, for God is nothing but goodness. Our soul is united to him who is unchangeable goodness. And between God and our soul there is neither wrath nor forgiveness in his sight.³⁰⁶

This conclusion, for Julian, arises from the clarification of her parable of the lord and the servant in Revelation Fourteen. Wrath is impossible for God because it would violate the divine nature. As Marilyn McCord Adams explains: “Anger is opposed to peace and love, in such a way as to be incompatible with the integrity of his [God’s] love, contrary to the nature of his power, wisdom, and goodness.”³⁰⁷

Julian refused to attribute wrath to God, so she was troubled by orthodox medieval concerns to justify God’s retribution towards those who disobey divine commands. She found the parable of the lord and the servant as the solution to the dilemma. In her parable, Julian insists that Adam’s fall is delineated as an

³⁰⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 46. 259.

³⁰⁷ Marilyn McCord Adams, “Julian of Norwich on the Tender Loving Care of Mother Jesus” in *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology*, Edited by Kelly James Clark (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 205.

inadvertent separation from God rather than a deliberate act of rebellion. Julian portrays actual sin as the result of human weakness, ignorance, and blindness rather than willful depravity:

Man is changeable in this life, and falls into sin through naiveté and ignorance. He is weak and foolish in himself, and also his will is overpowered in the time when he is assailed and in sorrow and woe. And the cause is blindness, because he does not see God; for if he saw God continually, he would have no harmful feelings, nor any kind of prompting, no sorrowing which is conducive to sin.³⁰⁸

Julian's concept of sin emphasizes the consequence of separation from God, not the rebellion of the will causing such separation. Baker illustrates Julian's argument by contrasting Augustine's and Julian's views of sin:

For Augustine, sin causes separation from God; for Julian sin ensues from such separation. She considers the suffering that results from sin not as a penalty inflicted by a wrathful God, but as the natural consequence of the sinner's violation of his or her "fair nature," [Julian, *Showings*, 63. 303] the breach of the ontological union between Creator and creature. And whereas Augustine emphasizes the perverse will of Adam's descendants, Julian concentrates on the godly will of the elect, "which never assented to sin nor ever will."³⁰⁹ [Julian, *Showings*, 53. 283]

Moreover, in Julian's parable the lord appears as a compassionate healer rather than a just judge. In contrast to the wrathful God of retributive theodicy, Julian's lord beholds his servant with a "double aspect": the lord looks on the servant, outwardly "very meekly and mildly, with great compassion and pity," and inwardly the lord "rejoiced over the honorable rest and nobility which by his plentiful grace

³⁰⁸ Julian, *Showings*, 47. 260.

³⁰⁹ Baker, *Julian of Norwich's Showings*, 99-100.

he wishes for his servant and will bring him to.”³¹⁰ Paying attention to the lord’s double attitude toward the servant, Jantzen argues that Julian’s theology is fundamentally different from some “elements of a theology of penal substitution, a theology mediated to the Middle Ages”:

According to the doctrine of penal substitution, God does initially assign blame to humankind for our sin; but because the Son takes the blame in our place, we can be saved. Julian’s view, by contrast, is that God does not attach blame at all. There is no fault in the servant’s fall into the ditch, and the lord never looks on him with anger but only with compassion and plans for a reward for his faithfulness.³¹¹

Furthermore, Julian provides the theological justification for her refusal to regard God as punitive in her subsequent interpretation of the servant as Christ, the second Adam: “And so has our good Lord Jesus taken upon him all our blame; and therefore our Father may not, does not wish to assign more blame to us than to his own beloved Son Jesus Christ.”³¹² God does not blame us because the Lord Jesus has “taken upon him all our blame.” No more does God blame us, who are equally beloved in God’s eyes despite our wretchedness, just as God sees his utterly beloved Son.

Concurring with Jantzen, Adams elaborates, “if we consistently conceive of God as the omnipotent tyrant who assigns heavy sanctions for those who violate His wishes, we will re-invent the worst versions of the doctrine of reprobation, mistakenly caricature God and His great deed, and thereby undermine our attempts

³¹⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 51. 268.

³¹¹ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 198.

³¹² Julian, *Showings*, 51. 275.

to cultivate trust and hope.”³¹³ We thus recognize that Julian’s revelations lead us to their images of Divine love and aim at a favorable emotional balance of trust over mistrust, of hope over despair. However, we need to be aware that Julian would not deny a transcendent God who is the omnipotent, omniscient and wholly other one. For Julian, God is the only necessary being, absolutely independent of everything else and everything owes its existence to this omnipotent God. To Julian, God, as the omnipotent source of all, is directly connected to her understanding of the nature of God as the creative and preserving love that constantly surrounds creation. Julian wants to emphasize that God’s love reaches out beyond God’s self towards all his/her beloved creations.

In Julian’s revelations, human beings are enclosed in God’s womb of love and their relationship with God is “not vertical but circular, surrounding us, holding us in love’s embrace,” and God is described as “never distant, but the very matrix which sustains us, ever present to human needs.”³¹⁴ Julian’s deep reflection on the love of God is a formidable challenge to the traditional image of God. It is for Julian God’s love that influences enormously the other attribute of God. In Julian’s description of God in the feudal imagery of her parable, as Nuth contends, any kind of image of domination is “removed by the homeliness of the lord’s love, a love which rejects the privileges of domination in order to be with the beloved, in order

³¹³ Adams, “Julian on the Tender Loving Care of Mother Jesus,” 210.

³¹⁴ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 95.

to function simply as friend and companion, rather than sovereign.”³¹⁵ To conclude, Julian’s purpose in formulating her unique spiritual theology depends upon her urgent pastoral motivation, which is to encourage trust in a God whose essence is love by counterbalancing the delusion of her age’s emphasis on a vengeful God. Related to the current issues in contemporary theodicy, these theological views about human nature—substance and sensuality, sin, and guilt—all provide for Julian important theoretical context for the pastoral concerns of her theodicy. So also do her views about the body and evil.

2. The Nature of the Body and Evil

In this section I explore Julian’s constructive view of the nature of the body and evil, which is strikingly different from the classical/medieval worldview on that issue. By clarifying Julian’s interconnected views of gender, the body, and sin, I also examine Julian’s spiritual theology and its implications to the problem of suffering and pain, especially as it is imposed upon women, which is a kind of destructive suffering that is socially constructed in the religious tradition. The understanding of the nature of the body and evil in the Christian tradition has been generally recognized by and founded on the notion of spiritualistic dualism (spirit over body), which has its roots in the body-spirit dichotomy abounding in Greek philosophy and culture at the beginning of the Christian era and which has had a

³¹⁵ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 94-95.

lasting impact on the Christian church.³¹⁶ Spiritual dualism looked upon matter and body as inferior to spirit and soul, and thus the soul needed to be liberated from the prison of the fleshly body. In this view, the body is somehow the source of evil. Especially, the neo-platonic distortions of some Augustine's ideas on the nature of body, soul, and genders, which determined the standard in the classical/medieval Christianity, have permeated Christian thinking to this very day. Affirming that both soul and body are definitive of humanity, Augustine challenges the body-negative position of the Manichaeans as he posits the location of sin in the will of the soul rather than in the body. Augustine does not say de facto that the body is evil. However in Augustine's final analysis, he retains the classical Greek hierarchy which designates the body as inferior to the soul. According to Augustine, the nature of the body is permanently damaged by sin. Furthermore, the body is the means for the transmission of sin through sexual intercourse.³¹⁷ According to Augustine, before the Fall there was no conflict between body and soul; sexual desire was controlled because the body obeyed the will.³¹⁸ Augustine refers to

³¹⁶ James Nelson, *Between Two Gardens: Reflections on Sexuality and Religious Experience* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1983), 6.

³¹⁷ Laurie A. Jungling, "Passionate Order: Order and Sexuality in Augustine's Theology," *Word and World: Theology for Christian Ministry*. Vol. 27 (Summer 2007): 317-318, 322.

³¹⁸ Vincent Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 117.

concupiscence or lust as a disease, a disorder of God's created order of mind over body.³¹⁹

Julian of Norwich, however, conceives body and soul together as "enclosed in the goodness of God." She says, "For as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the chest, so are we, soul and body, clad in the goodness of God."³²⁰ Julian understands that the body was created to bear witness to the goodness and beauty of the created world, and is an appropriate venue to approach God because God himself made it and loves it. Julian's positive body theology is grounded in the Incarnation of the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. The goodness of human nature, including the body, is revealed in the dual nature of Jesus as both divine and human. Julian believes that "in Christ our two natures are united, for the Trinity is comprehended in Christ, in whom our higher part is founded and rooted; and our lower part the second person has taken, which nature was first prepared for him"³²¹ Following the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ, God is also joined to the lower nature, the flesh of human creatures. Julian describes the process of God's joining both body and soul as the process of the soul becoming "sensual":

And when our soul is breathed into our body, at which time we are made sensual, at once mercy and grace begin to work,.... For I saw very surely

³¹⁹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Sex in the Catholic Tradition" *The Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism*, Lisa Isherwood (eds) (New York: New York University Press. 2000), 42-43.

³²⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 6. 186.

³²¹ Julian, *Showings*, 57. 291.

that our substance is in God, and I also saw that God is in our sensuality, for in the same instant and place in which our soul is made sensual, in that same instant and place exists the city of God, ordained for him from without beginning. He comes into this city and will never depart from it, for God is never out of the soul, in which he will dwell blessedly without end.³²²

The sensual soul joined to the body, and both soul and body are enclosed in the goodness of God. Rather than locating the “city of God” outside of this world, Julian locates this city within the human soul living in this world. In Julian’s anthropology, Jesus not only rules the soul; his presence also contains gifts from God to aid the growth of body and soul together:

And all the gifts which God can give to the creature he has given to his Son Jesus for us, which gifts he, dwelling in us, has enclosed in him until the time that we are fully grown, our soul together with our body and our body together with our soul. Let either of them take help from the other, until we have grown to full stature as creative nature brings about.³²³

For Julian, the discussion of the body was initiated by images of Christ’s suffering as revealed in her showings. If suffering is remedied by Christ himself, the body must have some inherent value worth salvaging. Consequently, the body is reconciled to God through belief in Christ as the cure for suffering. Faith in God, according to Julian, naturally leads to an acceptance of the body as not only capable of being cured, but worthy of it. The image of suffering Christ in her

³²² Julian, *Showings*, 55. 286-287.

³²³ Julian, *Showings*, 55. 287.

showings demonstrated “a more hopeful message to Julian, one that offered her a bodily solace as well as a spiritual one.”³²⁴

Some recent scholarship, particularly the works of Caroline Walker Bynum,³²⁵ has revealed that much medieval piety was not marked by a hatred of the body. Rather, the body was emphasized as a precious means for spiritual redemption. Bynum contends that in medieval piety “the body is not so much a hindrance to the soul’s ascent as the opportunity for it. Body is the instrument upon which the mystic rings the changes of pain and delight.”³²⁶ Ellen Ross also indicates that artistic and philosophical reflections on Christ in the late medieval period had come to focus on his humanity, especially pondering “the nature and effects of Christ’s crucifixion”, where “the suffering Christ in agony replaced the majestic Christ of resurrection and judgment.”³²⁷ One can notice that Christ’s body in late medieval Christianity was the central object of religious devotion both as represented in art and as present in the Eucharist. It was central both to individual

³²⁴ Gina Brandolino, “The “Chiefe and Principal Mene”: Julian of Norwich’s Redefining of the Body in A Revelation of Love,” *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (September 1996): 110.

³²⁵ See Caroline Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and the essays collected in *Fragmentation and Redemption Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

³²⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages,” in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 194.

³²⁷ Ellen Ross, “She Wept and She Cried Right Loud for Sorrow and for Pain: Suffering, the Spiritual Journey, and Women’s Experiences in Late Medieval Mysticism,” *Maps of Flesh and Light*, Ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1993), 46.

piety and to the identity of Christendom as a whole. In this regard, Julian was very much a woman of her day and “as a 14th-century text, Julian’s *Showings* shares something of this preoccupation with the body.”³²⁸

I mentioned that Julian’s positive body theology is grounded and revealed in the dual nature of Jesus as both divine and human. When we closely look at the incarnation we come to recognize that it can provide implications for our embodied existence by looking at how the perfect human, Jesus, experienced embodiment. In the end, the incarnation suggests that we need to experience a psychosomatic unity that overcomes feelings of alienation from our bodies.³²⁹ Jantzen thus contends that Julian’s understanding of the incarnated Jesus can play a significant role as “the remedy of the fragmentation between sensuality and substance” and as “the prototype for our reunification and healing.”³³⁰ For Julian, incarnation is a strong affirmation not only of the body and sensuality, but also of the possibility of experiencing the triune God through the body.

I here explore Julian’s positive implications to the problem of evil in relation to the views of the body, sin and gender. In terms of traditional Christian understandings related to a dualistic cosmology, women, who were more closely associated with the body, were treated as inferior and in need of control by men,

³²⁸ Brandolino, “Chiefe and Principal Mene,” 102.

³²⁹ M. Elizabeth Lewis Hall and Erik Thoennes, “At Home in Our Bodies: Implications of the Incarnation for Embodiment and Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* (Fall 2006): 43.

³³⁰ Grace Jantzen, *Power Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 150.

who are more closely associated with the soul.³³¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that Augustine concludes that a woman is in the image of God only when she is considered together with her husband, because the image of God is only in the higher, male part of her soul, and not in the lower, female part of her soul that is associated with the body. Therefore, the female body does not bear the image of God in and of itself.³³² In the end, Augustine's theory of a gendered two-part soul establishes woman's inherent inferior nature. The male/higher part of the soul should control the female/lower part of the soul, and this imagery of control provides theological support for the control of women by men. The problem is exacerbated by the association of the body and women with sin. Ruether notes how Augustinian teaching that women have incurred the greater sin through their priority in disobedience that caused the Fall was highly influential in both Protestant and Catholic circles.³³³ This association of woman with the body, the Fall and sin became an oppressive tool that caused suffering for women, who were

³³¹ About the argument that sexist dualism is intrinsically interconnected with the spiritualistic dichotomy in the Greek cultural backgrounds, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 78-79.

³³² Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Mysogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church." *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*. Rosemary Ruether (eds) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), 156. Also See Rosemary Ruether, "Augustine: Sexuality, Gender and Women." *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, edited by Judith Chelius Stark (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 54-56.

³³³ Ruether, "Sex in the Catholic Tradition," 45.

thought to bear the major portion of guilt. This signifies a kind of destructive suffering, which is socially constructed in the religious tradition.

Building on the Greek philosophical hierarchy of the superior “male” soul over the inferior “female” body, Augustine interprets biblical texts to prove women’s inferiority to men, and he associates women more closely with the body and sin. Judith Chelius Stark contends that Augustine’s interpretation of Eve’s creation as “helper” reinforces the association of women with the inferior body and sinful procreation because Augustine cannot imagine that a woman could help a man in any way other than in procreation.³³⁴ By defining woman’s nature as naturally inferior to man’s, Augustine and the other patristic Fathers could extol the virtues of virginity and continence in marriage as enabling women to overcome their inferior nature, while demanding that women remain subordinate to men. It is, however, striking that we can find a significantly different view on the body and gender from the classical/medieval worldview in the theology of Julian of Norwich, despite her awareness of the medieval male/priest dominant hierarchical culture. Julian constructs an anthropology that values the body and/or defines sin in a manner that does not implicate sexuality or women negatively.

In Julian’s conception of the effects of Adam’s sin on humanity, she mentions pain and blindness, not sexual desire. Throughout her discussion of the origin of human sin, Julian names only Adam, not Eve. Women are not held more responsible than men for sin. Sin as blindness is a key metaphor in Julian’s

³³⁴ Judith Chelius Stark, “Augustine on Women: In God’s Image, but Less So,” *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, 225-227.

doctrine of sin. Blindness prevents humans from seeing God, and thus we fall into sin: “And the cause is blindness, because he [a human being] does not see God; for if he saw God continually, he would have no harmful feelings nor any kind of prompting, no sorrowing which is conducive to sin.”³³⁵ In addition to blindness, which Julian defines in spiritual terms, another primary metaphor for sin is sickness. She identifies two types of sickness as the most prevalent:

God showed two kinds of sickness that we have. One is impatience or sloth, because we bear our labor and our pain heavily. The other is despair or doubtful fear . . . it is these two which most belabor and assail us . . . Then by our spiritual blindness and bodily sluggishness we are most inclined to these; and therefore it is God’s will that they should be known, and then we should reject them as we do other sins.³³⁶

Julian’s description of “spiritual blindness and bodily sluggishness” holds soul and body together in the inclination to sin. This union of body and soul is in contrast to theological traditions that postulate a disruption in the soul that subsequently affects the body. Julian also does not equate sin as sickness with sexual lust. Rather, her theology is situated in the medieval mystical tradition that used sexual and erotic imagery in a positive sense to describe the union of the soul with God.³³⁷

We can find an embodied spirituality that wholeheartedly embraced the body and materiality in the theological understandings of Julian. Her theology

³³⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 47. 260.

³³⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 73. 322.

³³⁷ For a discussion of this mystical tradition see Caroline Walker Bynum, “The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages” in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, 181-238.

denies the traditional hierarchy of soul over body that devalues the body as lower than or inferior to the soul and as the source of the human tendency to sin. Julian's appreciation of the human body as God's dwelling place can contribute to the theological expression of the value of the human person and help counterbalance the tendency in the Christian tradition to advocate body-transcending spiritualities.³³⁸ At the same time Julian's constant use of concrete bodily images, such as the images of Christ's bleeding, or the parable of embodiment in the servant and the Lord, suggests that embodied representations of spiritual things are vehicles in which the divine may dwell and may work the joining of material to the spiritual.

Julian's mystical writing, *Showings*, is full of emotional and sensual expressions. God is experienced through sensuality. There is no ascetic tendency towards the body, and a strong affirmation of both emotion and sensuality is emphasized. Julian overcomes the spirit-body dichotomy. Unlike some Christian Platonists who associate the body with evil and wickedness, Julian affirms the goodness of the body, because the body, like all things, was created out of God's goodness to manifest God's goodness. It is very clear that her anthropology is a holistic understanding of humanity as a psychosomatic unity, as body and soul together. Kerrie Hide thus argues that Julian attempts to "overcome the body / spirit split and spiritualization of the human person that was so prevalent in her day

³³⁸ Kerrie Hide, "The Parable of the Lord and the Servant: A Soteriology for Our Times," *Pacifica* 10 (1997): 64-65.

and that still scars theological anthropology.”³³⁹ Julian’s understanding of human nature enables us to appreciate that our destiny is divine life in God as spiritually embodied beings. Accordingly, our physical or sensual matter becomes our special means of reaching spiritual perfection. Julian informs or reminds contemporary society about the holiness of the body, sensual knowing and experiencing. Julian’s spirituality, as Jantzen contends, is an integrated and embodied spirituality because Julian’s spirituality “brings the whole of the self, sensuality included, into the unity of the love of God.”³⁴⁰

In a nutshell, Julian’s theology of embodiment provides an interesting theoretical underpinning for her pastoral concerns, and this contributes in an interesting way to contemporary discussions about the possible relationship between pastoral and theoretical themes of theodicy. It is a holistic understanding of humanity as a psychosomatic unity and provides a strong affirmation of human sensuality. It also implies that the body and women are not inferior, and are not to be associated with sin. In the end, we notice that Julian constructs an anthropology that values the body and/or defines sin in a manner that does not implicate sexuality as bearing the penalty of sin or women as being more responsible than men for sin. Julian breaks the traditional association of the body with women and sin.

³³⁹ Kerrie Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 203.

³⁴⁰ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 149.

3. Images of God and Divine Compassion

3. A. Images of God as a Mother

This section deals with Julian's theology of the motherhood of God as a vital response to the question in contemporary theodicy of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. One of the well-known features of Julian's account of her visions is her use of maternal imagery. Julian reveals to us the feminine nature of God in her images of God as a mother, which is a different image of God for her time and for ours. Brant Pelphrey says that "If God is "Mother" for Julian, it is impossible for her to think of God as a distant or forbidding judge who seeks to condemn or destroy the creation which God has made."³⁴¹ Bernard McGinn recapitulates Julian's theme of the divine motherhood:

Julian did not invent this language, which had a long tradition, but she brought it to a height of theological sophistication beyond anything found in earlier literature. Christ is our mother not only because the image of a mother's love helps us to overcome our fear of God, but more fundamentally because it explains the nature of our bond with Christ and the source of his constant solicitude for us."³⁴²

It is also important to note that, as Edmund Colledge and James Walsh say, "In no way does she wish to substitute the idea of the motherhood of God for that of his fatherhood; she wants to unite them."³⁴³ Julian believed motherhood is

³⁴¹ Brant Pelphrey, *Christ Our Mother: Julian of Norwich* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 39.

³⁴² Bernard McGinn, "The English Mystics" in *Christian Spirituality*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 204.

³⁴³ Edmund College and James Walsh, "Introduction" in *Julian of Norwich, Julian of Norwich: Showings*, 11.

complementary to fatherhood. She did not use her motherhood theology in an exclusive fashion to replace a patriarchal God with a matriarchal model. Julian portrays God as Father and Mother together in a profoundly holistic way in order to make a creative union, by relying on their differences and particularity not by just ignoring or negating differences of gender. Donahue-White says that Julian's motherhood image "can be read as one that transcends gender stereotypes yet simultaneously affirms the work that mothers do as paradigmatic images of God's work in the world."³⁴⁴ In this way, as Christine Allen says, "Julian stands in stark contrast with many contemporary women who are returning to a worship of a mother goddess with a clear background of rejecting God the Father."³⁴⁵ At the same time, we need to be aware that the Father for Julian is represented also as a loving force:

Our great Father, almighty God, who is being, knows us and loved us before time began. Out of this knowledge, in his most wonderful deep love, by the prescient eternal counsel of all the blessed Trinity, he wanted the second Person to become our Mother, our brother, and our savior. From this it follows that as truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother' Our Father wills, our Mother works, our good Lord the Holy Spirit confirms.³⁴⁶

This image of the Father is far from the wrathful God who rules by fear, punishment, and justice. Julian considers the main obstacle in spiritual life as the feeling of overwhelming dread towards God that leads one to despair and

³⁴⁴ Donahue-White, "Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich," 19.

³⁴⁵ Christine Allen, "Christ our Mother in Julian of Norwich," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, Vol.10, No. 4 (1981): 422.

³⁴⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 59. 296.

despondency. Thus Julian's idea of motherhood counterbalances the terrifying features generally associated with fatherhood. Insisting that Julian's maternal aspect of God "contributes the quality of tenderness to, and thereby guarantees the loving character of, the entire Trinity," Paula Barker comprehends Julian's central concern as "the transformation of human feelings of dreadful fear towards God into feelings of love."³⁴⁷

Jean Leclercq contends that Julian's original contribution to the theme of the maternal aspect of God is the theological application of the motherhood image of God to the Trinitarian interrelationships.³⁴⁸ Throughout her work, Julian uses "mother" to describe all three persons of the Trinity. Julian understands that the one and triune God is our mother in the threefold function of motherhood toward us:

I understand three ways of contemplating motherhood in God. The first is the foundation of our nature's creation; the second is his taking of our nature, where the motherhood of grace begins; the third is the motherhood at work. And in that, by the same grace, everything is penetrated, in length and in breath, in height and in depth without end; and it is all one love.³⁴⁹

Based on the Trinitarian understanding, Julian understood that the one and triune God is our Mother. Julian, however, emphasizes Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, in her exploration of God's motherhood. In Julian's vision Christ reveals the entire Trinity: "For where Jesus appears the blessed Trinity is understood, as I

³⁴⁷ Barker, "The Motherhood of God in Julian's Theology," 301, 303.

³⁴⁸ Jean Leclercq, "Preface" in Julian of Norwich, *Julian of Norwich: Showings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 9.

³⁴⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 59. 297.

see it.”³⁵⁰ For Julian, Christ, who is enclosed within the Trinity, is our true mother. Christ incorporated all humanity into himself and thus we are enclosed within mother Christ. Sprung summarizes, “Mother Jesus, knit as he is to us, and specially associated as he is with our life on earth, is enclosed within the Trinity as our earthly life is enclosed within eternity.”³⁵¹ Our union with and enclosure within mother Christ means union with and enclosure within the Trinity. Julian’s motherhood image leads us to profound insights for human beings both as cherished recipients of God’s love and as capable of being drawn into relationship with the Triune God and thus to their own wholeness.

The metaphorical dimension of Christ’s motherhood is given even stronger biological descriptions in the *Showings*. The maternal images that Julian uses focus on the compassion of motherhood. First, Julian associates images of motherhood with the Eucharist, depicting the divine mother as one who nurtures and sustains. As the natural mother nourishes her child with the milk of her body, so too Jesus feeds his Christian children with his own body through the Eucharist:

The mother can give her child suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacraments, which is the precious food of true life; and with all the sweet sacrament he sustains us most mercifully and graciously.³⁵²

³⁵⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 4. 181.

³⁵¹ Andrew Sprung, ““We nevyr shall come out if hym”: Enclosure and Immanence in Julian of Norwich’s Book of Showings,” *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol.19, No. 2 (June 1993): 49.

³⁵² Julian, *Showings*, 60. 298.

With this image of the breastfeeding mother, Julian associates the breast of the mother with the wound in Christ's side; the human mother breastfeeds her child, but Jesus nourishes his children with blood and water through his wounded body.

Julian furthermore mentions our mother Holy Church, which is founded in Christ Jesus. Since Christ's body on earth is the church, his motherhood simultaneously births us into the new life of a community of Christians working and serving God in the world. The blood and water that flow from the wound in Christ's side symbolize our birth to new life in Christ. At the same time, these fluids symbolize the birth of our ecclesial life through the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. For Julian, the Church, which is understood as "our Mother's breast" is "where our Lord dwells."³⁵³ We are nourished by the Church through both its teaching and sacramental life. According to Pelphrey, the Church for Julian is "the place where we are nourished by Christ, our Mother" and "acts as his womb, protecting us and nourishing us in this life."³⁵⁴

In addition, Julian's work is full of womb imagery. Julian consistently speaks of "enclosure," using words like "enveloping" and "wrapping" to describe the tactile way in which humanity is united to Christ her mother.

I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us. And so in this sight I saw that he is everything which is good, as I understand.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Julian, *Showings*, 62. 303.

³⁵⁴ Pelphrey, *Christ Our Mother*, 253, 255.

³⁵⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 5. 183.

In wrapping us, embracing us, and completely enclosing us in love, Christ himself is depicted as womb-like, as he is capable of enveloping his children in comfort and love. Donahue-White comprehends Julian's image of womb as the Trinitarian womb, identifying three interrelated stages of divine mother work:

First, there is the Trinitarian work of creating – what I call Trinitarian “womb work” – that culminates in incarnation. Secondly, there is the work of redeeming that begins with incarnation and climaxes in the hard labor of Jesus' birthing/dying on the cross. The third and final stage consists in the work of sanctifying, that comprises the long process of nurturing, raising and educating a child and is completed eschatologically with the mother leading the child back to the place of origin, that is, back to the Trinitarian womb.³⁵⁶

Taking into consideration that Julian's images of the Trinitarian womb work are specified as “keeping,” “enclosing,” “increasing,” “knitting,” and “oneing,” we, human beings realize that our being, originating in God, never becomes radically separated from God. Those images that Julian peculiarly uses are meant to express the uniting or joining of divinity and humanity through the maternal work of incarnation. Thus, it can be said that for Julian the divine mother not only restores humanity to his/her likeness by taking on our likeness but also restores the unity of human kind with God in the Incarnation. The work initiated in incarnation is brought to completion in the birthing/dying on the cross, namely the mother work of Christ as the hard labor of giving birth. Christ as mothering God has the capability to birth us to new life. In short, Christ has the soteriological function of bringing us to new life.

³⁵⁶ Donahue-White, “Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich,” 27.

It is very significant to recognize that Julian's image of Christ's motherhood is introduced immediately after the parable of "the lord and the servant." Jantzen emphasizes that Julian's motherhood image, which never appears in the Short Text, takes long years of reflection, when finally Julian "gives this idea theological articulation as an aspect of her experience."³⁵⁷ Nuth conjectures that "Julian searched for an image to sum up her reflections on the salvific work of Christ, [which is revealed in her parable] and the image of mother seemed to suit her purposes best."³⁵⁸ Accordingly, we recognize that the full understanding of divine motherhood came when she realized the meaning of the parable of "the lord and the servant." Julian states in the parable that the servant's motive in becoming human was "to do the service and the office of motherhood in everything."³⁵⁹ Thus, "Christ as our Mother" is, for Julian, essentially integral to her soteriology. Julian says:

The second person of the Trinity is our Mother in nature in our substantial creation, in whom we are founded and rooted, and he is our Mother of mercy in taking our sensuality. And so our Mother is working on us in various ways, in whom our parts are kept undivided; for in our Mother Christ we profit and increase, and in mercy he reforms and restores us, and by the power of his Passion, his death and his Resurrection he unites us to our substance.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 118.

³⁵⁸ Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 66-67.

³⁵⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 60. 297.

³⁶⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 58. 294.

We thus recognize that the symbol of Christ as mother, as Nuth says, “acts as summary symbol for Julian’s whole soteriology.”³⁶¹ According to Hide, what makes Julian’s soteriology unique is “the dialectical unity created between Christ’s role as deep wisdom of the Trinity and mother and the reciprocal enclosure between us and each person of the Trinity.”³⁶²

Nuth comprehends the essence of Julian’s soteriology by contrasting Anselm’s theory of the Atonement, which, called “satisfaction theory,” depends on an understanding of the satisfaction rendered by Christ as a restoration of the moral order. Nuth understands Anselm’s soteriology to be centered on “the fact of sin” and “human responsibility for sin and the need to participate through union with Christ in its eradication.”³⁶³ In his atonement theory, Anselm regards God’s justice as the rightful demand for satisfaction for the damage done by sin. However, Nuth contends that for Julian, God’s love and God’s justice do not contradict each other; rather, they form a relationship of harmony. God’s justice for Julian means “simply that God loves humanity forever, since God always sees our essential lovableness.”³⁶⁴

The soteriological difference between Julian and Anselm is clearly revealed in their understanding of the reason of the Incarnation. While for Anselm the

³⁶¹ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 67.

³⁶² Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment*, 132-133.

³⁶³ Joan Nuth, “Two Medieval Soteriologies: Anselm of Canterbury and Julian of Norwich,” *Theological Studies* 53 (1992): 622.

³⁶⁴ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 80.

Incarnation is described “as making satisfaction to God for the damage caused by sin,” the reason of the Incarnation for Julian is considered “God’s desire that human creation be increased and fulfilled beyond its original splendor through God’s assuming human flesh.” Nuth thus concludes that “the need to repair the damage done by sin is certainly subsumed into Julian’s soteriology, but her discussion of the reason for the Incarnation transcends it.”³⁶⁵ Salvation, thus, for Julian, means the restoration of fallen human nature to its original state in the relationship of love with God. It is more than the forgiveness of sins to satisfy God’s justice. The Incarnation, for Julian, signifies that embodiment of God’s love, God’s desire for union with humanity, which surpasses the meaning of repairing the damage caused by sin.

To say that Christ is our Mother is to affirm that the Logos became human in order to save us by incorporating all humanity into him or herself. Julian uses the image of Christ’s motherhood to indicate the real, absolute, and everlasting union between Christ and humanity. We are saved by being united with Christ incarnated. It is due to this union that God was never wrathful and never shall be toward sinners. This realization gave birth to her full-blown image of Christ’s motherhood. This Christological principle also contributed to her theological affirmation that motherhood is an essential nature of God. So Julian highlights rich possibilities in relation to the question of the possible nature of God in contemporary theodicy.

³⁶⁵ Nuth, “Two Medieval Soteriologies,” 640.

3. B. Divine Compassion in Responding to Human Suffering

We recognize that Julian's whole theology ultimately finds its focus in the passion of Christ. For Julian, the passion itself is the supreme manifestation of the love of God. To Julian, the meaning of compassion is closely connected with and clarified by the experience of suffering with Christ in His passion. Compassion is potentially the foundation of the relationship with others as well as with Jesus Christ. She writes:

I saw that every natural compassion which one has for one's fellow Christians in love is Christ in us, and that every kind of self-humiliation which he manifested in his Passion was manifested again in this compassion, in which there were two different understanding of our Lord's intention. One was the bliss that we are brought to, in which he wants us to rejoice. The other is for consolation in our pain, for he wants us to know that it will be turned to our honor and profit by the power of his Passion, and to know that we suffered in no way alone, but together with him, and to see in him our foundation.³⁶⁶

Julian's comment, "We suffered in no way alone, but together with him, and to see in him our foundation," informs us that when we suffer we can suffer with Christ; and we can have compassion of all creatures and suffer with them because Christ's suffering with us is the foundation of our participation in compassionate love for others. We need to be open to this experience of Christ's suffering love. Julian discusses this compassion towards fellow Christians:

So I saw how Christ has compassion on us because of sin; and just as I was before filled full of pain and compassion on account of Christ's passion, so I was now in part with compassion for all my fellow Christians, because he loves very dearly the people who will be saved, that is to say God's servants.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 28. 227.

³⁶⁷ Julian, *Showings*, 28. 226.

We recognize that for Julian the cause of our sin is inseparable with the compassion for all her fellow Christians. Brant Pelphrey contends that Julian's concept of compassion is best understood as operating in two directions:

It is, on the one hand, the suffering which Christ has done with us and on our behalf: when we suffer in sin, Christ also suffers on the cross. At the same time, compassion becomes our gift when we begin to suffer with Christ on the cross, on behalf of others. In Christ, our own suffering becomes compassionate suffering, and we share in the redemptive work of Christ.³⁶⁸

Julian's whole theology is in effect a "theology of compassion," because it is centered in the crucifixion and the passion of Christ within which the compassion of God is always closely connected. For Julian, the passion of Christ is not only the cause of our salvation but also the cause of Julian's compassion to her fellow Christians. In brief, the passion of Christ is the foundation of our compassion for our fellow Christians.

Sarah McNamer explores Julian's notion of compassion as an ethical foundation by way of affective reading of compassion and her new reading of compassion as a female emotion. She contends that "Julian of Norwich describes how her visions of the suffering Christ – visions in part generated by the practice of affective meditation and feminized "beholding" – deepened her pity for her fellow Christian."³⁶⁹ McNamer claims that Julian focuses on the emotion and feeling of Mother Mary who has to face her innocent son's death in order to present

³⁶⁸ Pelphrey, *Christ Our Mother: Julian of Norwich*, 184.

³⁶⁹ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 150.

“maternal nurturance as the foundation for an ameliorative, protective form of compassion.”³⁷⁰ For Julian, the compassion of Mother Mary is the foundation of our compassion for others.

We also find the meaning of compassion as an ethical foundation in the young Julian’s prayer for three things. Her first prayer was for an understanding of the passion of Christ. The second prayer was for a physical illness. The third and last prayer was for ‘three wounds’: true contrition, loving compassion, and the longing of the will for God.³⁷¹ Julian’s request to share in the passion of Christ was to participate in Christ’s suffering, and, through this, to see sin and suffering from God’s perspective. It is a request to awaken in her the meaning of Christ’s compassionate love for humanity which would facilitate her salvation and the transformation of her life. Julian’s asking for severe physical illness was to firstly identify with the suffering of Christ and thus to seek greater solidarity with suffering humanity. Jantzen reminds us that “Although Julian’s request for a vision of the passion and for a severe illness are unusual, therefore, she does not fit the popular modern picture of a mystic longing for raptures and ecstasies and unusual experiences for their own sake.”³⁷²

The first wound, true contrition, in Julian’s prayer for three wounds, was to seek “turning away from self-orientation to attend to God,” which makes humans

³⁷⁰ McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, 162.

³⁷¹ Julian, *Showings*, 2. 177.

³⁷² Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 60-61.

free from “compulsions and self-regarding motives so that real care for others becomes possible.”³⁷³ The second wound, loving compassion, is parallel to her earlier prayer seeking for the identification with the compassionate Christ. The third wound of longing for God is the summation of all the other requests. We need to be aware of that Julian’s desire for unity with God in Christ is not an escape from social responsibility. Julian is concerned for her fellow Christians and seeking to develop experiential empathy with their sufferings as Christ does.

Through the analysis of recent work on the impassibility debate I explored in chapter II, we recognize that the suffering of humanity is clearly among the primary concerns of passibilists, and many theologians relate their passibilist conclusions to their own experiences of human suffering. Here, I will explore Julian’s possible responses to the impassibility debate, focusing on her devotion to the suffering of the Crucified Christ and her spiritual theology of divine compassion. Analyzing that contemporary belief in a suffering God has arisen as a response to the psychological need, in the face of suffering, for a transcendent fellow sufferer, Anastasia Foyle argues that “modern Christians tend towards passibilist theology as a response to suffering partly because reflections upon Christ’s Passion and the sufferings of the saints decreasingly fulfill the need for an empathetic yet transcendent consoler.”³⁷⁴

³⁷³ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 68.

³⁷⁴ Anastasia Foyle, “Human and Divine Suffering,” *Ars Disputandi*, 5 (2005), paragraph number: 31.

According to Foyle, pre-modern believers viewed the saints and martyrs as ‘soul friends,’ fellow sufferers and consolers: “People wished to appeal to a transcendent companion who had experiential knowledge of their own ordeal or misfortune with a profound feeling of kindred spirit that arose as a result of the shared experience.”³⁷⁵ In addition to the cult of saints, medieval devotion to Christ’s Passion also encouraged people to find consolation for their own sufferings by a process of reflection on Christ’s suffering. This tendency had the effect of encouraging Christians to perform acts of mercy to victims of suffering as devotions to the wounds of Christ.³⁷⁶ Foyle makes a clear argument that pre-modern Christianity could be far from insensitive to the suffering of humanity and far from oblivious to the need for a transcendent fellow sufferer. Christ’s incarnate life and his Passion relates directly to the suffering of humanity. The spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich reflects and supports this view and helps us to contextualize and put into perspective recent trends in theology, including the impassibility debate.

Julian’s *Showings* begins with an overwhelming image of self-giving love in the face of the crucified Jesus. For Julian, the Passion is understood as the supreme revelation of the love of God. Julian’s vivid images of the suffering of Christ and God’s compassionate love through the cross powerfully convey the solidarity with the suffering of humanity. Julian’s vision of the crucified Christ can

³⁷⁵ Foyle, “Human and Divine Suffering,” paragraph number: 31.

³⁷⁶ Foyle, “Human and Divine Suffering,” paragraph number: 33.

be described as the icon of Christ's abiding solidarity with suffering humanity. The identification with Christ's passion allows people's own suffering to be taken up with Christ's and may even have a cathartic effect. It is, as I disclosed in chapter 2, closely connected with the mystical experiences of Christ's healing presence, where the identification with Christ's suffering is "a heartfelt appreciation of his [Christ's] compassionate suffering for us and with us" that "moves the sufferer into a profound and mysterious healing"³⁷⁷ Our direct experience of Christ's sharing in human suffering makes explicit that human beings are in relationship with a God whose love, as Julian insists, enfolds us. So Julian here is also speaking to the third issue developed in Chapter 2—the concern for the victims of destructive suffering. I will return to this theme in Chapter 4.

Although Philip Sheldrake says that Julian does not suggest directly that God suffers, he contends that in Julian's theology there are hints that God is not untouched by our condition. Sheldrake, emphasizing that God is indissolubly joined to the human condition and longs for us in the Incarnation, cautiously mentions that the element of passibilism are included in Julian's theology, saying that "somehow, in Christ, God is touched by suffering out of love."³⁷⁸ Hide, commenting that "Christ reveals that the very nature of God is to suffer for love, to take the suffering of humanity to God's own being, to be a saving God through

³⁷⁷ Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation* (New York and Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 50.

³⁷⁸ Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology: Christian Living and the Doctrine of God* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 109.

oneing in suffering,” contends that Julian never conceives of a God unmoved by human suffering.³⁷⁹

In her parable of the lord and the servant, Julian creates a theology of suffering that is sensitive to the human experiences of affliction. In the parable Julian turns her attention to the lord, who embodies how God relates with human beings in suffering. God experiences heartfelt compassion while waiting patiently for the servant to complete his task. Julian describes the place in which the lord waits for the beloved servant as “the place which the lord sat on was unadorned, on the ground, barren and waste, alone in the wilderness.”³⁸⁰ The image of the lord waiting on the dry, barren earth for the beloved servant illustrates how God relates to humankind in times of suffering. This is not a portrait of an impassible God, but of a God of pathos who is steadfast in love, sincere and empathetic.

Revealing that Julian is deeply concerned about a God who is able to relate to creatures and care for human beings in times of suffering, Hide argues that “classical theism’s model of a God who, while being impassible, requires recompense for sin through the death of the Son is no longer convincing.”³⁸¹ To Julian, God is a responsive God who unites with those who suffer through divine compassion and transforms suffering without justifying its evil. This awareness of a responsive God can bring a very powerful consolation and comfort. In addition,

³⁷⁹ Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment*, 205.

³⁸⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 51. 271.

³⁸¹ Hide, “The Parable of the Lord and the Servant,” 65.

Hide contends that Julian circuitously critiques “classical theism’s model of an impassible God by presenting a biblical view of God who has a rich emotional life, who feels love, compassion, pity, mercy, and concern for the suffering of the servant,”³⁸² which is especially described in the parable of the lord and the servant.

To sum up, Julian’s images of self-giving love in the face of the crucified Jesus and the lord in the parable hold together a respect for God’s mystery and a responsive God’s compassion for the pain of the human condition. The image of a responsive, compassionate God offers hope from desolation and the discouragement we feel in the light of evil and suffering. The faithfulness of God’s compassion gives confidence that all will be well, which enables human beings to endure enormous hardship and to extend compassion to others. At the same time, this image of a compassionate God reveals how joy exists in the midst of suffering, offering hope in face of despair.

4. Conclusion

I end this chapter by elucidating how Julian’s themes of spiritual theology that I examined in this chapter will have positive implications for and is relevant to the contemporary theodical issues that have surfaced in the current debates between theoretical and practical theodicy. The exploration of Julian’s notion of the Fall, sin and human nature shows that her approach to the problem of evil involves a theoretical context that supports her primary pastoral thrust. Her theological view

³⁸² Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment*, 205-209.

is unique and contrasts medieval, orthodox retributive theodicy. While Julian's approach is "teleological," meaning that it focuses on the purpose and ends of suffering, the traditional approach is "etiological," concerned with the causes and consequences of evil. In contrast to medieval, orthodox retributive theodicy, which justifies God's punishment of sinners, and blames sinners, who freely chose to disobey God's commands, Julian claims that God in her vision never ascribed to blaming nor is he wrathful towards sinners. So she avoids the criticisms that some practical theodicians have raised against traditional retributive theodicy. It is her spiritual awakening to "Christ's identification with humanity," namely, the union between Christ and humanity that leads Julian to the conviction that all humans are eternally subjects of God's unconditional love despite the Fall and the subsequent actual sins of humanity. For Julian, God has nothing except compassion for the sufferings caused by sins. From this, Julian arrives at a new way of understanding the problem of sin in light of divine love.

Through Julian's constructive view of the nature of the body and evil, which is significantly different from the classical/medieval worldview, we recognize that Julian's appreciation of the human body as the means of attaining God and her constant use of embodied representations show us that the human body is the vehicle in which the divine may dwell and may work the joining of material to the spiritual. This understanding not only has positive implications for the Christian tradition that has often tended to advocate a body-transcending spirituality, but also enables us to realize that human beings are understood as integrated spiritual/embodied beings. For Julian, humanity is understood holistically as beings of psychosomatic unity, which provides a strong affirmation

of the human body and sensuality. In sum, Julian constructs an anthropology that does not implicate the body negatively nor associate it with women, as inferior to the soul and as bearing the location of sin. She also defines sin in a manner that does not accuse women of being more responsible than men for it. Julian in her theological anthropology thus avoids many of the criticisms that some pastoral theodocists have raised against traditional themes of theoretical theodicy.

Lastly, through Julian's themes of images of God as a mother and God's compassion, we recognize that the symbol of Christ as mother acts as summary symbol for Julian's whole spiritual theology. Thus Julian contributes significantly to the contemporary issue in theodicy related to the nature and significance of God in responding to suffering. Julian's purpose in using the image of divine motherhood is to express the ontological, mystical union between Christ and humanity. It is by virtue of this union that God was and never will be wrathful toward sinners. This realization culminated in her distinctive image of Christ's motherhood. This Christological principle contributes to her theological affirmation that motherhood is an essential attribute of God. At the same time, through her response to the problem of a suffering God, we recognize that Julian's vivid images of the suffering of Christ powerfully convey the solidarity with the suffering of the humanity, and the image of a responsive, compassionate God offers hope from desolation and the discouragement we feel in the light of evil and suffering. So Julian responds insightfully also to the current question in theodicy concerning the destructive suffering of people. Julian explores a spiritual theology that is sensitive to the human experiences of suffering. Julian's *Showings*, or *Revelations of Love* deserves serious attention by all the theological seekers who

would formulate a theology that is wholly consistent with the fundamental Christian belief that God is Love.

Chapter 4

The Contributions of Julian of Norwich to Issues in Contemporary Theodicy:

The Spiritual Theology of Julian of Norwich as a Resource for Theodicy II

This thesis explores and clarifies how certain themes in Julian's spiritual theology have a positive bearing on significant issues in contemporary theodicy: the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering, the question of the destructive suffering of people, and the question of the theoretical context for pastoral theodicy. Through the previous chapter's exploration of Julian's major themes in spiritual theology, we see that Julian understands the problem of sin in light of divine love in a novel way, especially in connection with her particular anthropology, images of God and view of divine compassion, which provide positive implications regarding one of the contemporary theodical issues – namely, the question of the nature of God in relation to human suffering. In this chapter, I will explore the positive implications and suggestions of Julian's spiritual theology in responding to the issues of the destructive suffering of people and the question of the theoretical context for pastoral theodicy.

I will begin by exploring how Julian's theology of suffering, which is very sensitive to human experiences of affliction, is grounded in her emphasis on the passion of Jesus and divine compassion. At the same time, I will illuminate Julian's eschatological dimension that could provide afflicted people with the hope for healing; I aim to reveal that Julian's approach provides a possibly hopeful response to the problem of affliction and *han*. This chapter also explores Julian's positive implications for the question of the theoretical context for pastoral theodicy.

Julian's spiritual theology is a rich theoretical context that provides the motivation she felt necessary for responding in practical ways to evil and suffering in the world. Lastly, in concluding this chapter, I will explore how Julian creatively and effectively integrates the two dimensions of practical and theoretical theodicy.

1. The Problem of Affliction and *Han*

This section explores how Julian's theology of suffering might have a positive bearing on the contemporary theodical issue of destructive suffering. Julian's theology of suffering, which is bolstered and grounded by her emphasis on the passion of Christ, is a theology of compassion; thus, her approach provide consolation and a healing process for people experiencing destructive suffering. As revealed in Chapter 2, destructive suffering does not involve any spiritual transformative power for the victim. Accordingly, it always remains non-redemptive and serves no purpose and gains nothing positive. Affliction, which is described by Simone Weil, is a radically destructive form of suffering that includes unjustified physical, psychological and social sufferings. I also proposed the notion of *han* as a social-political form of destructive suffering. *Han* is a critical wound to the heart of both the individual and the collective that is caused by "unjust psychosomatic repression, as well as by social, political, economic, and cultural repression."³⁸³

³⁸³ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 10.

Some theologians, as I revealed in Chapter 2, such as Simone Weil, Andrew Sung Park, Wendy Farley, Marilyn McCord Adams, basically agree that people are inevitably subject to suffering because of tragic flaws that are logically entailed in our world. In this structure, we cannot say that one's suffering is always the result of one's own sin and misdeeds. They are struggling to rethink issues of theodicy in light of destructive suffering by rejecting the traditional Christian theistic worldview that all of the evils and sufferings of humanity are a consequence of and punishment for sin. They argue that the theme of retributive punishment in traditional Christian theodicy has not only neglected the innocent victims of destructive suffering but also failed to respond compassionately to victims of destructive suffering. In line with the above mentioned arguments, we recognize that Julian of Norwich also provides a theological response to the problem of suffering that is in stark contrast with the traditional theology of retribution. Julian's spiritual theology provides an alternative theological way to understand the victims of destructive suffering. We must recall that Julian's purpose in writing on the revelations of God's love was to console people who are plagued by their guilt for sin and their fear of a wrathful God, which conflicts with their hope for an all-embracing love of God.

As I also illustrated in Chapter 2, we can find the theological response to the problem of destructive suffering in the spiritual power of the cross through Adams's, Weil's and Michael Stoeber's theological emphasis on that theological issue. We recognize that the identification of one's own anguish with the suffering of Christ provides healing power for afflicted people through the religious experience of divine consolation and presence, which invites them into a healing

relationship of love with God; thus, this theme leads to a much more actively compassionate stance towards other human beings. It is very interesting that this process of healing and the consolatory power of the cross are also represented in greater depth in the structure of Julian's theological theme of Jesus' suffering on the cross. Accordingly, here I explore more specifically Julian's theology of suffering, with particular focus on her theological emphasis on the passion of Christ, which arises from Julian's clarification of meaning and interpretation of the visions of the crucified that she received from God.

For Julian, the passion of Christ, as Grace Jantzen points out, is essentially understood as "the supreme manifestation of the love of God."³⁸⁴ Most of the bodily images in Julian's vision reveal to us intense, vivid visualizations of Christ, especially during his passion. The crucified Christ is the central visual image for the *Showings*. The notion of passion is significant in understanding Julian's overall spiritual theology because her theological reflection is grounded directly in the passion of Christ. The passion, as it is connected with all of Julian's experiences of bodily suffering, offers a principle for understanding what love really is. The more we grow in understanding the passion of Christ, the more deeply God's love can be seen. Julian's understanding of the love of God as revealed in the passion of Christ can contribute to the problem of sin and suffering in contemporary theologies and have a positive bearing on the function and process of healing from suffering.

³⁸⁴ Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 91.

The first, second, fourth, fifth, eighth and ninth of Julian's revelations were directly concerned with the passion of Christ. Julian describes her vision of the passion of Christ in a very vivid, intense, and hideous way. In the first revelation, Julian saw the extensive bleeding of Christ's head resulting from the crowning of thorns:

The great drops of blood fell from beneath the crown like pellets, looking as if they came from the veins, and as they issued they were a brownish red, for the blood was very thick, and as they spread they turned bright red. . . . The copiousness resembles the drops of water which fall from the eaves of a house after a great shower of rain, falling so thick that no human ingenuity can count them.³⁸⁵

In the second revelation Julian describes Christ's face in the passion as an image of "contempt, foul spitting, buffeting, and many long-drawn pains..." "...half his face, beginning at the ear, became covered with dried blood, until it was caked to the middle of his face, and then the other side was caked in the same fashion."³⁸⁶ The Fourth Revelation describes the bleeding of Christ's body as a result of the scourging:

The fair skin was deeply broken into the tender flesh through the various blows delivered all over the lovely body. The hot blood ran out so plentifully that neither skin nor wounds could be seen, but everything seemed to be blood. . . . And I saw it so plentiful that it seemed to me that if it had in fact and in substance been happening there, the bed and everything all around it would have been soaked in blood.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 7. 187-188.

³⁸⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 10. 193.

³⁸⁷ Julian, *Showings*, 12. 199-200.

The eighth revelation conveys the appalling anguish of Christ almost at the point of death, and the discoloring of his face and the drying of his flesh. The picture is deeply personal and poignant:

I saw his sweet face as it were dry and bloodless with the pallor of dying, and then deadly pale, languishing, and then the pallor turning blue, and then the blue turning brown, as death took more hold on his flesh. . . . This was a painful change to watch, this deep dying, and his nose shriveled and dried as I saw; and the sweet body turned brown and black, completely changed and transformed from his naturally beautiful, fresh and vivid complexion into a shriveled image of death.³⁸⁸

As Christ's blood dried up and his body was exposed to blasts of wind and cold, he became increasingly vulnerable: "Christ's body became so discolored, so dry, so shriveled, so deathly and so pitiful."³⁸⁹ Thus exposed and fragile, the process towards death continued: "the sweet skin and the flesh broke all in pieces and the hair pulled it from the bones. Through this, [Christ's body] was torn in pieces like a cloth, and sagged down, seeming as if it would soon have fallen because it was so heavy and so loose." Julian describes Christ's terrible experiences in great realism using concrete images drawn from daily life: "He was hanging up in the air as people hang a cloth to dry."³⁹⁰ Christ had been hanged on the cross as if he were a rag. He was exposed to extreme affliction.

In the passion, nothing remained interior or concealed. Christ gave all that was in him – all that he was and all that he had – to the point that nothing was left

³⁸⁸ Julian, *Showings*, 16. 206.

³⁸⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 16. 207.

³⁹⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 17. 208.

but shredded remnants of his flesh, which revealed the fullness of his humanity and love. Frederick C. Bauerschmidt explains Christ's body, which is broken and transgressed on the cross, as a body that "has no interior, because it is at every point of its existence 'exteriorized' by participation in the infinite divine compassion revealed in Christ, a compassion enacted in visible practices of forgiveness and vulnerability"³⁹¹ In line with Bauerschmidt, Julia Lamm connects Julian's divine revelations of Christ's passion to a theology of *kenosis*:

Julian's originating revelation is thus essentially a *kenosis*—a self-emptying love, an emptying of all that is human in Christ so that nothing remains hidden. This image of revelation as exposure in the sense of exteriorization—and, more specifically, as a kenotic exteriorizing—became for Julian the basic paradigm for divine revelation.³⁹²

After theologizing Christ's passion as a "kenotic exteriorizing" exposure, Lamm draws a connection between Christ's terrible vulnerability and the incarnation. Lamm, citing Julian's comment that "Christ died in our humanity, beginning at the sweet Incarnation and lasting until his blessed Resurrection,"³⁹³ contends that "Christ's exposure on the cross revealed . . . the full implication and extent of the Incarnation."³⁹⁴ Julian saw the Incarnation as an exposure to the human condition. Her exposition of the parable of "the Lord and the Servant" in Chapter 51 contains

³⁹¹ F C Bauerschmidt, "Julian of Norwich-Incorporated." *Modern Theology* 13:1 January (1997): 96.

³⁹² Julia A Lamm, "Revelation as Exposure in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*," *Spiritus*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring 2005): 60.

³⁹³ Julian, *Showings*, 23. 219.

³⁹⁴ Lamm, "Revelation as Exposure in Julian of Norwich's *Showings*," 63.

her fullest account of the Incarnation. The servant's falling into the dell simultaneously symbolizes both the incarnation and humanity's fall: "God's Son fell with Adam."³⁹⁵ Indeed, Christ so immersed himself in our humanity that he experienced the extremes of human vulnerability. Julian viewed the Incarnation through the lens of her vision of the passion.

Christ's exposure on the cross revealed the "great unity between Christ and us."³⁹⁶ Namely, it was in the passion that Christ's complete identity with our humanity was revealed. Predominantly, Julian became aware that Christ had suffered and died for her personally. She writes:

Then our good Lord put a question to me: Are you well satisfied that I suffered for you? I said: Yes, good Lord, all my thanks to you; yes, good Lord, blessed may you be. Then Jesus our good Lord said: If you are satisfied, I am satisfied. It is a joy, a bliss, an endless delight to me that ever I suffered my Passion for you; and if I could suffer more, I would suffer more.³⁹⁷

Christ's appalling pain from this exposure revealed that, despite our own faults and weaknesses, God loves us beyond measure. Julian had a greater understanding of this from Christ's blessed words, which are given as a type of locutional showing: "See how I love you, as if he had said, behold and see that I loved you so much, before I died for you, that I wanted to die for you. And now I have died for you, and willingly suffered what I could."³⁹⁸

³⁹⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 51. 274.

³⁹⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 18. 210.

³⁹⁷ Julian, *Showings*, 22. 216.

³⁹⁸ Julian, *Showings*, 54. 221.

Julian explores the intimate connection between humanity and God which is manifested in the incarnation through the crucifixion. Through his pain, Christ is joined not only to the suffering of humanity, but to that of all creation, and salvation comes to everything through his joyful pain. In the meantime, Julian's visions of Christ's passion were troubling to her because they were both lovely and hideous: they were lovely because they reveal Christ's great love, and they were hideous in their horrendous pain. Julian beholds in horror the dying Christ, waiting in distress for the moment of his death. When she believes that this moment has come, there is a remarkable change. In the ninth vision, she writes:

Suddenly, as I looked at the same cross, he changed to an appearance of joy. The change in his blessed appearance changed mine, and I was as glad and joyful as I could possibly be. And then cheerfully our Lord suggested to my mind: Where is there now any instant of your pain or of your grief? And I was very joyful.³⁹⁹

We can notice how Julian integrated these complicated feelings into her understanding of Christ's passion and how pain and grief transform into delight. Julian internalizes the passion of Christ, finding joy and bliss as the culmination of the passion:

Then said Jesus our good Lord said: If you are satisfied, I am satisfied. It is a joy, a bliss, an endless delight to me that ever I suffered my Passion for you; and if I could suffer more, I should suffer more.... This deed and this work for our salvation were as well as devised as God could devise it. It was done as honourably as Christ could do it, and here I saw complete joy in Christ, for his joy would not have been complete if the deed could have been done any better that it was.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 21. 215.

⁴⁰⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 22. 216, 218.

Julian's visions of Christ's passion do not end on a note of sorrow but rather joy and hope because she, in her vision, beholds that Christ's face on the cross transformed into an expression of joy. Julian now comes to experience the joy of the risen Christ and finally comprehends the meaning of Christ's passion for human beings:

I understood that we are now on his cross with him in our pains, and in our sufferings we are dying, and with his help and his grace we willingly endure on that same cross until the last moment of life. Suddenly he will change his appearance for us, and we shall be with him in heaven. . . . And the reason why he suffers is because in his goodness he wishes to make us heirs with him of his joy. And for this little pain which we suffer here we shall have an exalted and eternal knowledge in God which we could never have without it. And the harder our pains have been with him on his cross, the greater will our glory be with him in his kingdom.⁴⁰¹

In her descriptions of Christ's passion, Julian demonstrates his perfect union with the Father, which "gave strength to his humanity to suffer more than all men could." At the same time, in the crucifixion, Julian sees Christ as absolutely at one with humanity, undergoing the worst human suffering and pain: "And he suffered for the sins of every man who will be saved; and he saw and he sorrowed for every man's sorrow, desolation and anguish, in his compassion and love."⁴⁰² Julian in her account of Christ's sufferings emphasizes His shared identity with us as creatures. She expands the meaning of passion from the physical suffering of Christ to the feeling of pain experienced by all creatures.

⁴⁰¹ Julian, *Showings*, 21. 215.

⁴⁰² Julian, *Showings*, 20. 213.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Christ's passion itself, for Julian, is the supreme manifestation of the love of God. Julian's vision of the suffering Christ expresses unwavering confidence in the eternal love of God who is united with human beings despite their sins. As discussed previously, sin for Julian is comprehended in terms of this unbreakable bond: the power of sin never destroys the joining of God and humanity but provides the occasion for God to demonstrate unending love for us. We can also grasp that the meaning of compassion is closely related to the experience of suffering with Christ in the passion. Mona Logarbo connects Christ's own pain and compassion to the meaning of salvation:

In the final analysis, salvation for Julian is the restoration to and participation in this [the compassion of God's] love which unites and gives being to all reality and is revealed most comprehensively in Christ's Passion. To be restored to love and to participate in it is, of course, to love others with that love which is the heart of Christ's Passion. Indeed, Christ's own pain and compassion is the basis of all human compassion.⁴⁰³

To Julian, the compassion of God is always closely connected with and centered in the passion of Christ. Thus, we can say that Julian's theology is a theology of compassion. For Julian, the passion of Christ is not only the cause of our salvation but also the cause of Julian's compassion to her fellow Christians. In brief, the passion of Christ, or Christ's suffering with us in love, is the foundation of our participation in compassionate love for others.

Julian's devotion to Christ's passion encourages people to find consolation for their own suffering through reflecting upon his suffering and experiencing his

⁴⁰³ Mona Logarbo, "Salvation Theology in Julian of Norwich: Sin, Forgiveness, and Redemption in the Revelations." *Thought* 61 (1986): 375.

compassionate presence. Christ on the cross, as a transcendent companion, is a kindred spirit to people whose experiential knowledge of their own afflictions reminds them of Christ's greater suffering to which they can be drawn in a healing, spiritual movement. Reflections upon the passion of Christ are finally leading us to recognize and experience spiritually Jesus' loving nature and his compassion for the suffering of humanity. Namely, it is signified as the icon of Christ's abiding solidarity with suffering humanity. This tendency, as Anastasia Foyle writes, has the consequence of heartening people "to perform acts of mercy to victims of suffering as devotions to the wounds of Christ."⁴⁰⁴

To sum up, Julian's images of the suffering Christ comprises a major theme in her revelations of the love of God. Her extremely vivid portrayal and detailed explanation of the passion event powerfully convey Christ's solidarity with the afflictions of humanity. These resounding meditations on the passion of Jesus console us in a provocative way, drawing us into the divine Presence, where Christ is present most intimately in our sufferings, carrying us gently through our pain. Julian's deep consciousness of Christ's suffering mysteriously consoles afflicted people in a radically healing way.⁴⁰⁵ Furthermore, Julian's images of self-giving love in the face of the crucified Jesus can be interpreted as directly signifying another expression of a responsive God's compassion for the affliction of the

⁴⁰⁴ Anastasia Foyle, "Human and Divine Suffering," *Ars Disputandi*, 5 (2005), paragraph number: 33.

⁴⁰⁵ Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation* (New York and Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 50-51.

human condition. Julian's reflection on the passion of Christ offers hope from the desolation and discouragement we feel when faced with evil and suffering, enabling us to endure enormous hardship and to extend compassion to others. Julian's emphasis on the passion of Christ offers consolation and healing to people who are undergoing the destructive impact of suffering.

2. Afterlife Beliefs and Theodicy

The previous section showed that Julian's reflections upon the suffering Christ provide hope and a process of healing to afflicted people who are able to become open to this divine Presence. This section will illuminate the eschatological dimension of Julian's visions as another possible hopeful response to the problem of destructive suffering. I will explore how Julian's eschatological approaches might have theological and pastoral significance, especially in regard to the positive contributions they make to the integration of theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy.

In Chapter 2, I explored briefly the eschatological responses to destructive suffering of John Hick and Stoeber, who both provide coherent proposals of afterlife possibilities which hope for opportunities for continued moral and spiritual maturing towards an eventual redemptive transformation of humans. Stoeber emphasizes that such afterlife speculation, which is grounded in the compassionate love of God, is a possible response to destructive suffering because it would provide for healing and continued spiritual integration and transformation, and be consistent with and fulfill the conception of a God of infinite love and power. Accordingly, afterlife beliefs allow us to hope for healing and recovery from the

effects of destructive suffering and the ultimate spiritual redemption of all humanity, without denying the reality of destructive suffering.

Although Julian does not directly mention an intermediate state, the eschatological dimension of her spiritual theology, which is centered on her chief theme of divine compassion, provides a possible theological and pastoral response to the problem of evil and suffering. We recognize that Julian is dealing with destructive suffering through her fundamental theological theme or divine compassion, which primarily stems from her reflection upon the passion of Christ. I also revealed that for Julian, God's compassionate love through the cross powerfully conveys solidarity with the suffering of humanity and transforms suffering without justifying its evil, the awareness of which can bring very powerful consolation and comfort. Julian's approach of divine compassion has a strong pastoral emphasis that allows us to hope for healing and recovery from the effects of destructive suffering.

Julian, in her vision, received an answer from Jesus: "Sin is necessary, but all will be well. And all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."⁴⁰⁶ Julian is perplexed because she believes in the claim of the Church that many would be eternally damned. Later, she was told of the "Great Deed" that God would perform at the end of time: "This is the great deed ordained by our Lord God from without beginning, treasured and hidden in his blessed breast, known only to

⁴⁰⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 27. 224-225.

himself, through which deed he will make all things well.”⁴⁰⁷ Based upon this vision, she stresses an eschatological hope in the structure of her spiritual theology, which plays an important role in providing consolation and comfort to afflicted people. This eschatological hope is bolstered by her counters to the idea of hell and the theme of retributive justice.

Augustine believed that scripture identifies hell as the destiny for the majority of humankind because this is the way by which God can best vindicate God’s justice. Hell is an appropriate response to sin. Augustine’s view of hell was elaborated at the end of his work *The City of God*, where he describes in considerable detail the destinies of all, both those who belong to the City of God and those who do not. Graham Keith understands that there were pastoral reasons why Augustine stressed the existence of eternal hell: “For one thing, [Augustine] believed that the fear of hell actually helped many to make a first step toward true piety. Moreover, he believed that a diminished doctrine of hell brought diminished standards of piety and a false hope within the church.” However, Keith concludes that for Augustine, “there was no hope that anyone who died impenitent or unbaptised could improve their standing after death.”⁴⁰⁸

Augustine’s doctrine of hell came as a consequence of his teaching about original sin. For Augustine, Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden was a monstrous, unjustified act against the goodness of God such that, in itself, merited eternal

⁴⁰⁷ Julian, *Showings*, 32. 232-233.

⁴⁰⁸ Graham Keith, “Patristic Views on Hell—Part 2,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 71:4 (1999), 297, 299.

punishment. Augustine's view of original sin was foundational in his own theology and enormously influenced the Western church. Augustine contends that it was Adam who first sinned and brought the judgment of death upon himself and all his posterity. For Augustine, not only was original sin a disastrous historical reality, but so too were the innumerable actual sins which proceeded from the original sin. Sin, for Augustine, "contained within itself the seeds of its own punishment."⁴⁰⁹ Keith, revealing that any consideration of hell entails the idea of retributive justice, argues that Augustine undoubtedly created a retributivist base "when he emphasized that Adam's sin merited hell for Adam and all his descendants."⁴¹⁰ In fact, Augustine rejected Origen's view that all divine punishments are essentially corrective. Origen sees reformation as implicit in all divine punishment and believes that suitable punishment frees or cleanses human souls from injustice; it benefits the sufferer who finally finds that all chastisement is for his or her ultimate good. This view of Origen's was actually derived from his understanding of God's character – namely, that God's judgments had to be good as well as just – and of God's ultimate purpose to bring everything into willing subjection to himself.⁴¹¹ However, it seems that Augustine fairly typically suggests that the divine punishment was merely a way of describing God's willpower to employ fair

⁴⁰⁹ Keith, "Patristic Views on Hell—Part 2," 302.

⁴¹⁰ Keith, "Patristic Views on Hell—Part 2," 306.

⁴¹¹ Keith, "Patristic Views on Hell—Part 2," 305-306.

judgment. Augustine felt no need to give a detailed rationale for God's justice, which he saw as a direct revelation of God and a matter of faith for the believer.

In addition, in terms of Augustine's view of hell, the torturing pains of the damned are both physical and spiritual, and the damned are kept in existence by God himself.⁴¹² Following Augustine, medieval thinkers typically viewed hell as an eternal torture chamber, perhaps with God himself as the torturer. Kelly James Clark clearly illustrates medieval views of the retributive idea of hell:

The medievals believed in one further sense of God's goodness: God is good by the retributive punishment of the damned. . . . The problem of God and hell addressed by the medievals is the problem of justifying God's goodness while God permits or inflicts intense pain and suffering for eternity. The immensity and duration of the pain and suffering are often justified by God's retributive justice: the damned, because of their *ante mortem* sins, merit this sort of punishment.⁴¹³

Arguing that medieval views of both divine goodness and the doctrine of hell are incompatible with our best understandings of goodness, Clark criticizes retributive punishment is an inadequate justification of eternal torment. He concludes that "the medieval notions of goodness and hell seem to make God more a sadistic torturer who keeps Her victims alive just so She can maximally inflict pain than a caring

⁴¹² Kelly James Clark, "God Is Great, God Is Good: Medieval Conceptions of Divine Goodness and the Problem of Hell," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2001): 16. According to Augustine, "All other punishments, whether temporal or eternal, inflicted as they are on every one by divine providence, are sent either on account of past sins, or of sins presently allowed in the life, or to exercise and reveal a man's graces." See Augustine, *City of God*, 21:13.

⁴¹³ Clark, "God Is Great, God Is Good," 22.

parent who would with all her power never cease attempting to benefit her child through her sufferings.”⁴¹⁴

Julian’s image of God, however, contradicted the popular image of God as judgmental, stern, and angry. Through grace, the sinner is forgiven. Mercy and forgiveness are foundational for Julian’s theology of sin. While human beings continue to sin, Christ assures Julian that “all will be well.” Julian asked to be given a vision of Purgatory or Hell; once again, she is denied.⁴¹⁵ That Julian received no visions pertaining to Purgatory or Hell indicates that she was to focus on the idea of salvation. Her time was plagued with themes of guilt and punishment. Fear of punishment through eternal damnation held Christians as emotional hostages. Julian’s revelations offered hope to such a sin-centered system of belief.

Julian wrestles with the Church’s teaching on the damned as she attempts to make sense of her insights. Church teaching at her time affirmed that “there must be the possibility of hell to allow for human freedom. God will make no one enter the kingdom against their will.”⁴¹⁶ Yet, Julian’s theology challenged the teachings of her time. Julian wrestles with her concept of a loving, merciful God as opposed to the popular image of a judging wrathful God. In her *Showings*, Julian struggles to reconcile the teachings of her revelations about sin and salvation with those of the Church. Her revelations – especially through her awakening to the meaning of

⁴¹⁴ Clark, “God Is Great, God Is Good,” 29.

⁴¹⁵ See Julian, *Showings*, 33. 234.

⁴¹⁶ Richard Chilson, *All Will Be Well* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1996), 20.

the parable of the Lord and the Servant – taught that God is a loving and merciful God who does not approach sinners with wrath, and that sin itself becomes an honor to the saved in Heaven.

According to Joan Nuth’s conjecture, Julian’s doctrine that “all shall be well” hints at *apocatastasis* or universal salvation.⁴¹⁷ Julian shifts away from wrath and judgment and focuses instead on reconciliation. Although Nuth insists that “Julian does not, strictly speaking, teach a doctrine of universal salvation,”⁴¹⁸ she posits that Julian’s revelations seem to come close to preaching it, the concept of which is positioned in a belief that the reality of human freedom to commit sin is never powerful enough to overcome the salvific will of God. In a similar vein, Kerrie Hide conjectures that Julian’s soteriology can be situated in the concept of *apocatastasis* or universal salvation because Julian’s message that “all shall be well” indicates the inclusive nature of God’s desire for the final status of human well-being. She asserts, however, that Julian’s conception of universal salvation is “not a pure doctrine of *apocatastasis* that naively ignores that reality of sin, trivializes human freedom, and devalues the human struggle to live a good life.”⁴¹⁹

At first, Julian does not see this message of “all shall be well” as being compatible with the Church’s teachings. Julian finds it impossible to understand God’s ways, but she receives some consolation with regards to her inquiry in the

⁴¹⁷ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 18.

⁴¹⁸ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 168.

⁴¹⁹ Kerrie Hide, *Gifted Origins to Graced Fulfillment: The Soteriology of Julian of Norwich* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 185.

words “what is impossible to you is not impossible to me. I shall preserve my word in everything, and I shall make everything well.”⁴²⁰ Nuth explains the meaning and purpose of Julian’s revelations as seeming to come close to the teaching of universal salvation.

But she finds it far more important to stress the power of God’s love to conquer to evil in all its forms and to bring “every kind of thing” into perfection for which it was created. Since God’s love is infinitely more powerful than diabolic or human efforts to perpetrate evil, we can hope that God will effect the salvation even of those whom human judgment deems irrevocably lost . . . Finally, Julian expresses faith in some eschatological deed, presently beyond human knowledge and understanding, through which God will bring everything into the fulfillment established as God’s will from the beginning.⁴²¹

Through her revelations Julian comes to shift her emphasis away from God as the angry judge of damnation, towards God as the one who makes all things well, especially in her time when fears of damnation flourished. Julian’s hope that, at the end of time, “all shall be well” is not naive optimism. Julian was conscious of human sins and weaknesses but had a realization that sin cannot conquer human life and God’s wisdom. Julian’s effort is to present to her troubled times the image of a God who loves the whole of creation in an absolute way. Eschatological hope pertains to people who trust that this divine love can bring all into eternal fulfillment.

⁴²⁰ Julian, *Showings*, 32. 233.

⁴²¹ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 168.

Julian does not, however, limit her theology to the Christian tradition. She seems to be questioning the axiom “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*”⁴²² Julian may have gone on to conclude that salvation was not limited to baptized Christians. This is Nuth’s understanding: “Julian’s revelations leads to the conclusion that it is at least much more probable that everyone will be saved than that some will be damned.” Julian’s theology of salvation, Nuth suggests, is extended to “those outside the pale of Christianity and unacquainted with the gospel message of salvation, along with all the aspects of human history that do not appear consistent with Christian doctrine.”⁴²³ At one point in her writing, Julian makes note of another insight that supports universal salvation – she refers to a deed that the Trinity will perform at the end time to make all things well:

There is a deed which the blessed trinity will perform on the last day, as I see it, and what the deed will be and how it will be performed is unknown to every creature who is inferior to Christ, and it will be until the deed is done. . . . This is the great deed ordained by our Lord God from without beginning, treasured and hidden in his blessed breast, known only to himself, through which deed he will make all things well. For just as the blessed trinity created all things from nothing, just so will the same blessed trinity make everything well which is not well.⁴²⁴

⁴²² In 1302, a papal document, the bull *Unam Sanctum* of Pope Boniface VIII was released. This bull included a profession of faith which affirmed the oneness of the Church; hence the title *Unam Sanctum*. Its basic impact on our topic was to reinforce the axiom “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus,*” outside the Church no salvation. Thus, a spirit of exclusivism permeated the soteriology of the Church. Such was the theological climate into which Julian was born. For further comment on the bull *Unam Sanctum* and its axiom, “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus,*” See Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

⁴²³ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 165.

⁴²⁴ Julian, *Showings*, 32. 232-233.

Nuth contends that Julian is referring to “some further salvific act on the part of God” at the end of time, through which God will save those presently outside of Christianity.⁴²⁵ Denise Nowakowski Baker notes that Julian concentrates “on this manifest promise of salvation and provides a theodicy for all who will be saved.”⁴²⁶ Julian’s insight on the final “deed” offers hope to those who are not predestined, that is, those who do not satisfy the Church’s requirements for salvation. Unlike St. Augustine, Julian stresses the “gratuitousness of salvation over the justice of damnation.”⁴²⁷

Julian’s view on the problem of hell is also clearly founded in her doctrine of predestination in Christ and her interconnected concept of “godly will.” In her understanding of human culpability and predestination, Julian basically agrees with Augustine. She, like Augustine and orthodox medieval theologians, believes that salvation is a gift from God, not a reward for human merits:

Our Lord God revealed that a deed will be done, and he himself will do it, and it will be honorable and wonderful and plentiful, and it will be done with respect to me, and he himself will do it . . . and I shall do nothing at all but sin; and my sin will not impede the operation of his goodness.⁴²⁸

However, Julian uniquely integrates the conviction of human sinfulness fundamental to the doctrine of predestination into an optimistic anthropology

⁴²⁵ Nuth, *Wisdom’s Daughter*, 167.

⁴²⁶ Denise Nowakowski Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings: From Vision to Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 69.

⁴²⁷ Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings*, 82.

⁴²⁸ Julian, *Showings*, 36. 238.

derived from mystical theology.⁴²⁹ In the Augustinian doctrine of predestination, the notion of the depraved will is central, but in Julian’s vision of predestination the notion of the “godly will” takes the central place instead. According to Augustinian doctrine, all humans, as a result of the original sin of their first parents, are born with a will already inclined toward evil, and therefore salvation solely depends on God’s gratuitous choice. But Julian, while affirming human culpability and God’s gratuitous election, takes a more optimistic attitude toward predestination. Julian proposes that there is a “godly will” in those who are predestined.

With her conception of the godly will, Julian attempts to reconcile the fact that the pervasiveness of human sin and guilt does indeed seem to contradict her confidence in the ultimate salvation of the elect with her faith in predestination. Julian resolves this apparent discrepancy by distinguishing between two aspects of the soul – the substance or higher part and the sensuality or lower part:⁴³⁰

Just as there is an animal will in the lower part which cannot will any good, so there is a godly will in the higher part, which will is so good that it cannot ever will any evil, but always good.⁴³¹

As explained in Chapter 3, in Julian’s anthropology, we are united with God in double knitting. The “higher part” of our nature (substance) is knit to God in its creation, and God is also knit to the “lower part” of our nature (sensuality) in the

⁴²⁹ Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings*, 75.

⁴³⁰ Baker, *Julian of Norwich’s Showings*, 76.

⁴³¹ Julian, *Showings*, 27. 242.

Incarnation. Then she explains more clearly the bond in relation to Christ: our “higher part” is founded and rooted in Christ, and our “lower part” is taken by Christ. Julian’s thought on the manner of God’s union with humanity in Christ can be summarized like this: the “substance” of our soul is knit to God by its being founded and rooted in Christ, and God is knit to the “sensuality” of our soul by Christ’s action in human history. By this understanding of human nature, Julian wants to emphasize that through God’s eternal plan, there is an indissoluble unity between human beings and God.

Therefore, it can be said that when Julian says, “For in every soul which will be saved there is a godly will which never assents to sin and never will,”⁴³² she is referring to presence of Christ in the chosen soul. Julian speaks repeatedly of our predestination to union with Christ:

Therefore our Lord wants us to know it in our faith and our belief, and particularly and truly that we have all this blessed will whole and safe in our Lord Jesus Christ, because every nature with which heaven will be filled had of necessity and of God’s rightfulness to be so joined and united in him that in it a substance was kept which could never and should never be parted from him, and that through his own good will in his endless prescient purpose.⁴³³

Our predestination to union with God cannot fully be realized apart from the Incarnation of Christ. The soul is united to God in its being, and God is united to the soul and the body by having taken on flesh for man’s redemption. The Son of God, perfectly fulfilling the will of the Holy Trinity, resides in the soul of man, and

⁴³² Julian, *Showings*, 37. 241-242.

⁴³³ Julian, *Showings*, 53. 283.

is his salvation.⁴³⁴ For Julian, the most eminent created thing is the substance of the human soul, which is the human element in the hypostatic union with the soul of Christ. The soul of Christ is predestined to be united with the Father, who is the source of sanctification in all other human souls that shall be saved.⁴³⁵

Julian asks in what sense ‘mortal sin’ may exist in those destined to be saved, and takes up again the disparity between our judgment of ourselves and God’s judgment of us. She concludes that within the assurance of God’s predestination of a soul to salvation, the term ‘mortal sin’ expresses a reality as perceived from the human side, not from God’s:

And therefore it often seems to us as if we were in danger of death and in some part of hell, because of the sorrow and the pain which sin is to us, and so for that time we are dead to the true sight of our blessed life. But in all this I saw truly that we are not dead in the sight of God, nor does he ever depart from us So I saw how sin is for a short time deadly to the blessed creatures of endless life.⁴³⁶

The integrity of ‘godly will’ derives from the unity that exists in the sight of God between Christ and all those predestined to salvation. About our predestination to union with God, Judith Lang succinctly states: “The redeeming sacrifice of Christ is the wellspring of God’s mercy, by which the constant failings of every chosen and repentant soul are forgiven, and a promise made that there will be no final condemnation of sin in that soul, because of its eternally ordained union with

⁴³⁴ Judith Lang, “‘The Godly Wylle’ in Julian of Norwich,” *Downside Review* 102 (1984): 168.

⁴³⁵ John P H Clark, “Predestination in Christ according to Julian of Norwich.” *Downside Review*, 100 no 339 April (1982): 87.

⁴³⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 72. 320.

God.”⁴³⁷ Thus, Julian believes that those chosen for salvation are incapable of ultimate defection and damnation for they have a godly will in their soul.

We have seen that Julian’s eschatological dimension is essentially to be understood in a way that is consistent with and fulfills the conception of a God of infinite love and power. Julian’s eschatological dimension provides a promising theological and pastoral response to the problem of evil and suffering, by providing the eschatological hope and possibility of healing to afflicted people who become overwhelmed by the fear of punishment through the doctrine of eternal damnation. We have also seen that it is Julian’s prominent theme of divine compassion that allows us to hope for healing and recovery from the effects of destructive suffering. Julian’s idea of divine compassion is initially displayed in her emphasis on God’s compassionate love revealed in the crucifixion, and further enlarged in her eschatological speculations. Julian’s eschatological hope is reinforced by her alternative theological view on the traditional concept of hell and strictly retributive justice. Theoretically speaking, she rejects traditional ideas of punishment and the retributive theme of theodicy. Instead, Julian proposes a strong teleological and eschatological view of theodicy, where evil and suffering, which are limited to a finite time in human history, will finally be explained and justified in the ultimate fulfillment of God’s intention for us as a perfectly loving God. In sum, Julian’s hope that, at the end of time, “all shall be well” provides eschatological hope—the possibility of healing to afflicted people—by shifting her emphasis away from

⁴³⁷ Lang, “‘The Godly Wylle’ in Julian of Norwich,” 172.

images of a God as an angry judge of damnation toward that of a God who loves absolutely all of creation and who will bring all into eternal fulfillment. This leads Julian to proffer an integration of theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy.

3. Abandoning Theodicy

As revealed in Chapter 1, a prominent trend in theology is to abandon theoretical theodicy. Many contemporary theologians who favor a practical response to evil argue that theoretical theodicy should be abandoned or subverted. This section will briefly clarify the issues associated with abandoning theoretical theodicy, and then explore how Julian and her spiritual theology might respond to this issue, especially through the dialogue with contemporary discussions on that topic. In Chapter 1, I divided the criticisms of theoretical theodicy raised by pastoral/practical theodicists into three categories: theoretical distortions and misconceptions, the neglect of human suffering, and the immorality of theodicy. Critics argue that theoretical theodicy is essentially a work of a highly abstract, solitary reflection that produces detached theoretical speculations which are not only epistemologically incongruous but also irrelevant to the alleviation of the cause of suffering. They argue that coping with suffering within the context of faith does not require a theoretical reconciliation of God and evil at all but only a practical response centered on solidarity with those who suffer in the world. Critics of theoretical theodicy also concurrently claim that theodicy has to engage with the particularity of human evil and acknowledge the significance of the victims of extreme suffering. In this respect, they argue that theoretical theodicy as a work of scholarly speculation does little to comfort a person actually experiencing the

reality of destructive suffering. It does not bring positive social effects to the victims of extreme suffering, and it does not bring healing or a deeper love of God. Moreover, some practical theodicians harshly criticize the apparent immorality of theoretical theodicy, arguing that theoretical theodicy provides a “tacit sanction of the myriad of evils that exist on this planet,”⁴³⁸ “disguises real evils” and actually “creates evils,”⁴³⁹ “sanctions the suffering of others, [and adopts] the perspective of a dispassionate bystander.”⁴⁴⁰ They claim that theoretical theodicy is morally harmful in the sense that it often works to silence the testimonies and voices of victims and to undermine protest and concrete action from others, thereby legitimizing suffering and evil by ignoring social dimensions, which are consequences of its seeking to apply general and universal explanations of suffering and evil to situations that are profoundly unique and particular.

As we saw in Chapter 2, these criticisms have come into question as scholars have moved to defend theoretical theodicy in substantial ways. They argue that the imperative to abandon or subvert theoretical theodicy is inappropriate because it does not provide sufficient evidence to show theoretical theodicy to be immoral, irrelevant, and a tacit sanction of evil. For them, theoretical theodicy itself is not evil in principle; rather, as a different level of response to the actuality

⁴³⁸ Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 50.

⁴³⁹ Terrence Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), 3.

⁴⁴⁰ Sarah Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust* (Albany, NY: SUNI Press, 2002), 138.

of suffering and evil, it can effectively generate consolation that can be equally considered a practical response to evil and suffering in the world. Defenders of theoretical theodicy argue further that theoretical theodicy is necessary because it fulfills a defensive role for practical theodicy in expressing a cognitive dimension and providing theological hope and motivating practical responses to evil and suffering in the world.

Here, I will focus on possible support that Julian provides for theoretical theodicy. I do not think that Julian could answer all criticisms mentioned above, but some of the arguments could be addressed, whether in part, circuitously, or directly. As both David O'Connor and Adams contend, theoretical theodicy is necessary because it fulfills the defensive role for practical theodicy as an expression of the cognitive dimension. This argument is also applicable to Julian's theodical project. Julian was a fourteenth-century English mystic who was profoundly concerned with suffering and the nature of sin. She repeatedly asks why God, with all God's prescience, did not create a different world, and why God created sin, knowing the suffering and evil it would cause. Julian fundamentally implies the question: how can we believe in an all-powerful and all-loving God when all around us there exists such devastating evil and suffering? Julian's existential and theological question stemmed from the fact that she witnessed a great deal of suffering during her life and could find neither existential comfort in a loving God, nor a reasonable explanation for that suffering. Julian was a woman of her day, and her approach to the problem of evil and suffering had its genesis in her experience of life in fourteenth-century England. Thus, we need to look into how

the historical data of the late medieval world might affect Julian's way of dealing with the theodicy question.

Deep anguish was experienced by fourteenth-century people, brought on by the horrors of recurring plagues, unceasing war, famines, and rebellions. The consciousness of the age in which Julian lived can be described as highly turbulent. It was an age of fear and uncertainty, social unrest and instability. We can conjecture that Julian's disposition and her desire for an anchorhold are quite understandable, given the circumstances and conditions of her medieval world. Especially, the plague in the fourteenth century caused unspeakable suffering and despair during Julian's lifetime. It swept through towns and villages leaving diseases and infected corpses in its wake, as well as a stunned and panic-stricken population.⁴⁴¹ Her medieval world was also one of war and famine. Julian witnessed indescribable amounts of suffering, fear, and death.

As a medieval Christian, she would have been told that suffering and evil were punishments from God, brought by sin. This agitation was reinforced by the religious ethos of the period. Christians in those times believed "that a scourge so sweeping and unsparing without any visible cause could only be seen as Divine punishment upon mankind for its sins."⁴⁴² This idea was bolstered by the

⁴⁴¹ More than a third of the population of England perished with the first and most deadly incursion of the so-called "Black Death" in 1348. The destruction was so swift and pervasive that many people thought it was apocalyptic: "The sense of a vanishing future created a kind of dementia of despair," and "ignorance of the cause augmented the sense of horror." See Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978), 99, 101.

⁴⁴² Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, 103.

widespread Augustinian theology on sin and suffering. Revealing that religious behavior during the fourteenth century was highly emotional and often fanatical, predicated on a preoccupation with and fear of death, William Fleming also writes about the widespread religious interpretation of this misfortune: “Driven by fear and a sense of guilt, people felt something had gone disastrously wrong and that the Black Death, like the Biblical plagues of old, must have been sent by an angry God to chastise mankind and turn him from his wicked ways.”⁴⁴³ In the medieval world, everything held a religious connotation, which is critical to an understanding of Julian’s whole project.

The medieval Church had a theological, juridical and administrative structure of hierarchy, and its doctrine so deeply affected all realities of consciousness that even social and political systems were seen as metaphors for religious systems. Julian belonged to the Church and repeatedly asserted her devotion and commitment to it. Julian remained unwavering in her lifelong commitment and intention to submit to the teaching of the Holy Church: “But in everything I believe as Holy Church preaches and teaches. For the faith of Holy Church, which I had before I had understanding, and which, as I hope by the grace of God, I intend to preserve whole and to practice, was always in my sight, and I wished and intended never to accept anything which might be contrary to it.”⁴⁴⁴ The fact that Julian spent her adult life in an anchorhold, attached to a church, also

⁴⁴³ William Fleming, *Art, Music and Ideas* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), 149.

⁴⁴⁴ Julian, *Showings*, 9. 192.

attests to the fact that she was a devoted Christian and churchwoman. On the other hand, Julian also believed that God was all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving. Medieval Christians definitely believed that God was all-powerful and all-knowing, but they did not commonly feel that God was all-loving. A despairing Julian was unable to reconcile the idea of a loving God with her perceptions of suffering in her world. Julian says, “For some of us believe that God is almighty and may do everything, and that he is all wisdom and can do everything, but that he is all love and wishes to do everything, there we fail.”⁴⁴⁵

Existentially speaking, when Julian was thirty and a half years old, she fell ill to the point of death. At that time, she had a mystical experience, which urged her to gaze upon the crucifix. During her vision, she pondered the problems of sin and suffering and asked God about them. She was answered that “all will be well” and was consoled, and she received many more comforting words from God, which provided existential relief. In summary, through her vision, Julian ascertained that God’s love is constant but people are blind, and in their despair, cannot see God’s love. She learns that people in despair do not realize how much God loves them, and they fail to realize how deserving they are of that love. This lack of perception is caused by the blindness of sin, “which scourge belabours man or woman, and breaks a man, and purges him in his own sight so much that at times he thinks himself that he is not fit for anything but as it were to sink into hell.”⁴⁴⁶ However,

⁴⁴⁵ Julian, *Showings*, 73. 323.

⁴⁴⁶ Julian, *Showings*, 39. 244.

Julian's visionary sight depicts humanity as worthy of being enfolded in the love of God: "I saw that he is to us everything which is good and comforting for our help. He is our clothing, who wraps and enfolds us for love, embraces us and shelters us, surrounds us for his love, which is so tender that he may never desert us."⁴⁴⁷

As Julian accepted these visionary words that formed in her understanding, her faith in a loving God was restored, and her hope for the world was resolved. She was able to find solace and conviction in a loving God despite the dreadful conditions of her life experience. Julian was also reassured that God was indeed all-loving as well as all-powerful and all-knowing. She also accepted that all shall be well and was soothed on an emotional level; however, she was not completely satisfied and still wanted more elucidation. Julian needed a way to support the idea theologically in order to reconcile the concept with her own experience of life. During her discourse with God, Julian perceived that sin was necessary and that God held no wrath towards his people nor did he assign blame for their shortcomings. Instead, God had compassion and unending love for them; however, Julian still did not understand why God would permit sin or create it in the first place, and furthermore, she was confused about God's wrath. She still wanted to know how it all worked. We recognize that Julian was a compassionate and intelligent theologian who yearned for a rational, intelligible explanation besides pursuing spiritual consolation and hope, which led her to a theodical transformation

⁴⁴⁷ Julian, *Showings*, 50. 183.

from practical or existential pursuit to a theoretical resolution with which she could finally be satisfied.

It is also important to notice that Julian resorted to the use of natural reason. She says, “Man endures in this life by three things, by which three God is honoured and we are furthered, protected and saved. The first is the use of man’s natural reason.” She further states that God wants us to use our reason because it is “the highest gift that we have received” from God.⁴⁴⁸ Julian wanted comfort but also something that would satisfy her intellectually and theologically. Julian’s long-time willingness to stay with her examination of the parable of the Lord and the Servant reaped a great reward for her – it enabled her to find a way theologically and theoretically to support the pastoral or practical theodicy immediately achieved by her vision. Through the application of her reason, Julian aspired to a more rational answer to her fundamental question of how all things could be well, given the agony that she witnessed in her world. At the end of the Long Text, Julian says that the meaning of the entire vision was made clear to her. She was finally answered in spiritual understanding with these words:

What, do you wish to know your Lord’s meaning in this thing? Know it well, love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love . . . So I was taught that love is our Lord’s meaning. And I saw very certainly in this and in everything that before God made us he loved us, which love was never abated and never will be. And in this love he has done he has done all his works, and in this love he has made all things profitable to us, and in this love our life is everlasting. In our creation we had beginning, but the love in

⁴⁴⁸ Julian, *Showings*, 83. 335, 340.

which he created us was in him from without beginning. In this love we have our beginning, and all this shall we see in God without end.⁴⁴⁹

As Julian matured, she was no longer content with simple emotional soothing; she wanted to understand, through the use of reason, how the notion of a loving God could be reconciled with human suffering. Julian overcame the final obstacle to her theodical certitude by affirming that God was indeed all-loving besides being all-powerful and all-knowing, which were never in question. Her struggle led her from hopelessness and despair to existential relief, theological probing and finally intellectual reconciliation.

Julian's transformation from pastoral or practical to theoretical theodicy concurs with Adams' contention that a philosophical response may be what is required at a later stage.⁴⁵⁰ Adams indicates that many participants in horrors, once the initial stage of suffering has passed and the suffering has subsided or ceased, repeatedly raise questions of meaning: "of why God allowed it, of whether and how God could redeem it, of whether or how their lives could now be worth living, of what reason there is to go on?"⁴⁵¹ Slightly different from Adams' argument is that Julian's vision provided an optimistic answer to her anxiety and those of people who suffer horrifically. It provided direct emotional consolation; however, we need to see that Julian's vision did not leave her intellectually satisfied. Julian

⁴⁴⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 86. 342-343.

⁴⁵⁰ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 187.

⁴⁵¹ Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 187-188.

would spend another twenty years studying her visionary insights before deeper theological meaning surfaced. This intellectual examination transformed Julian's work from a practical theodicy to an enduring theoretical theodicy with which she could be satisfied.

We can safely say that Julian finally recognizes that evil and suffering only become problems when they are at odds with one's beliefs that God is not only all-knowing and all-powerful but also all-loving. Julian's question of how an all-loving God could be responsible for the tragedies of the horrific world was the most pressing issue for her. The question of a loving God was the practical religious question that was of prime importance to Julian. We thus need to realize that, for Julian, practical theodicies are essential components in the development of religious theories on the rationality of the world. Without a practical theodicy in place, Julian would not have had the foundation for a theoretical examination of the issue. At the same time, Julian's immediate triumph was her ability to interpret her visionary experience into a rational story of God's love which provided comfort for her and her fellow Christians during such a devastating time. Hence, through Julian's concern for the theodical process of transformation, we can verify that in a context of faith, theoretical theodicy is required in order to provide the motivation necessary for a practical response to evil and suffering in the world.

The critics of theoretical theodicy, who call for the abandonment of theoretical theodicy as a whole, conclude that theoretical theodicy does not bring healing and a deeper love for God; it is a potential source of evil in and of itself. To

some degree, Adams concurs with the critics that there are cases showing that what is required in the face of extreme suffering is a practical response.⁴⁵² Stoeber also agrees that some historical themes in Christian theodicy, such as certain atonement and faith-testing theories, and extreme views of retributive punishment, have tended to belittle the incredible suffering of victims, or depict the Divine as having sadistic or masochistic attitudes; however, Stoeber basically contends that not only are the arguments against theoretical theodicy often over-exaggerated and inappropriate to all themes in theoretical theodicy but also “theodicy itself is not evil in principle” and not “all themes of theodicy are doomed to failure.” Therefore, he insists that theoretical theodicy should not be abandoned but rather “ought to do better.”⁴⁵³ In addition, Stoeber emphasizes that abandoning theoretical theodicy would be tantamount to abandoning the hope of Christian theodicy, which is that love and justice of an all-powerful God can be reconciled with the evils of destructive suffering. For Stoeber, it becomes clear that without theoretical theodicy there remains no basis or grounds for theological hope—for the healing and redemption of the victims of evil and suffering. Theoretical theodicy is necessary to the practical response to evil in the world, especially in supporting the hope for the victim’s healing and redemption.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, 187.

⁴⁵³ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 65.

⁴⁵⁴ Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 67.

Julian's spiritual theology, in line with Stoeber's argument mentioned above, shows that theoretical theodicies can generate a consolation or determination that can be equally considered a practical response to evil and suffering in the world. It is not surprising that most readers of Julian's *Showings* are struck by her optimism because such optimism is a quality that pervades her writings; however, when we consider the conditions of her ages, we can recognize that Julian's optimistic way of dealing with her times is most extraordinary. This is revealed most clearly in Anna Maria Reynolds' explanation of that age:

[Considering Julian's works of full of optimism,] we think of England in the 14th century as a country full of color, song, dance and merry-making. But we tend to ignore the dark side of medieval life: the prevalence of disease, the savage and vindictive punishments which could mean having a hand or a foot struck off for theft or allow an offender to be blinded or mutilated, the cheapness of human life . . . At the close of the Middle Ages, a sombre melancholy weighs on people's souls. Whether we read a chronicle, a poem, a sermon, a legal document even, the same impression of immense sadness is produced by them all. It would sometimes seem as if this period had been particularly unhappy, as if it had left behind only the memory of violence, of covetousness and mortal hatred, as if it had known no other enjoyment but that of intemperance, of pride and of cruelty.⁴⁵⁵

Reynolds says that it is not astonishing that life in the context of the late medieval world should be more inclined to pessimism than optimism because the close of the Middle Ages was, in fact, a period of great violence, cruelty and pessimism throughout Europe. The characteristics of the epoch to which Julian belongs are overshadowed by the vivid representation of death as hideous and threatening, and which sets her in contrast as a radiant figure of pure goodness, vibrant with faith,

⁴⁵⁵ Anna Maria Reynolds, "Julian of Norwich: Woman of Hope," *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sep 1984), 118-119.

hope and love. Then, what is the resource of the optimism she exudes? Julian repeatedly makes clear that her cheerfulness rests on something outside of herself. Julian's hope not only rests on sound theological foundations but also exhibits characteristics normally associated with authentic Christian hope. Julian's hope is challenged by her acute awareness of two unpleasant facts – her own sinfulness and the presence of sin, evil, and suffering in the world she lives in. She is tormented by an attempt to reconcile in her own mind two apparently irreconcilable truths – that we are all sinners and that nonetheless God does not blame us. One of the surest things Julian realized is that the relationship between God and man is not broken by human failure.⁴⁵⁶

Julian underscores the truth that Jesus is the visible manifestation of the divinity to man as well as the chief representative of man before God. Julian explains that the Father may not and does not wish to assign more blame to us than to his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, because Christ has taken upon himself all our blame and we are members of His body. Especially, Julian's parable of the Lord and the Servant enabled her to look beyond the creature's weakness and inadequate efforts to the compassionate and supportive love of God, which generated a vision of strength and fresh hope. God loves us because God is good, not because we are good.⁴⁵⁷ Saying that Julian was “a herald of hope in the face of a social and

⁴⁵⁶ Anna Maria Reynolds, “Woman of Hope,” in *Julian: Woman of Our Day*, ed. Robert Llewelyn (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1987), 15-16.

⁴⁵⁷ Reynolds, “Woman of Hope,” 17.

religious depression” in Julian’s context of medieval England, Patricia Vinje assesses that Julian “urged her even-Christians to look beyond the immediate difficulties of life to future days and she encouraged them to cope with the present hard times by extending compassion toward one another. Julian never erased the suffering of her people, but she did ennoble it.”⁴⁵⁸ There are Julian’s famous phrases, which bring out an important quality of Christian hope – namely, the eschatological hope:

And I understood no greater stature in this life than childhood, with its feebleness and lack of power and intelligence, until the time that our gracious Mother has brought us up into our Father’s bliss. And there it will truly be made known to us what he means in the sweet words when he says: All will be well, and you will see it yourself, that every kind of thing will be well. And then will the bliss of our motherhood in Christ be to begin anew in the joys of our Father, God, which new beginning will last, newly beginning without end.⁴⁵⁹

Julian’s hope can be understood in terms of interpersonal relationships. Regarding this, Reynolds says, “Our relatedness to Christ, our whole life, can be response, but God’s words must precede our reply. Furthermore, Julian’s hope exhibits the characteristic of solidarity in love.”⁴⁶⁰ In addition, to say that Christ is our Mother is to affirm that the Logos became human in order to save us by incorporating all humanity into him or herself. We are saved by being united with Christ. Julian uses the image of Christ’s motherhood to indicate the “real, absolute, and

⁴⁵⁸ Patricia Mary Vinje, *An Understanding of Love According to the anchoress Julian of Norwich* (Salzburg, 1983), 40-41.

⁴⁵⁹ Julian, *Showings*, 63. 305.

⁴⁶⁰ Reynolds, “Julian of Norwich: Woman of Hope,” 122.

unbreakable⁴⁶¹ union between Christ and humanity. It is due to this union that God never was wrathful and never shall be toward sinners. We can conclude that Julian was a woman in whom Christian hope was active, based on the goodness, love and reliability of God as revealed in scripture and in the person of Christ. Julian's eschatological vision of perfected humanity in Christ offers firm ground for hope and assurance. We need to keep in mind that Julian is confident, joyful and optimistic, secure in this theological foundation.

Julian's eschatological hope is entirely paralleled with the modern theologian's eschatological thrust: "With a gratitude based on God's fidelity, on everything he has done, the Christian can look back, knowing that God, who has so wonderfully begun his work in creation, is pursuing it in an ineffable way in Jesus Christ, and will fulfill it in him on the day of the Parousia."⁴⁶² Julian established a firm theological ground for the eschatological hope in the face of spiritual desolation and abandonment. She encouraged her fellow Christians to believe that everything is in God's hands and that God alone has the power to make things well through which she offered them an example of how to utterly trust God in all things especially in the midst of desolation. This message of hope, I believe, makes Julian entirely relevant to today's horrified world.

⁴⁶¹ Christopher Abbott, *Julian of Norwich: Autobiography and Theology, Studies in Medieval Mysticism* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 112.

⁴⁶² Bernard Häring, *Hope Is the Remedy* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1972), 145.

We have explored Julian's possible responses to the problem of abandoning theoretical theodicy, with a focus on revealing her process of transformation from practical to theoretical theodicy and her eschatological dimension. Julian informs us that theoretical theodicy, as a cognitive level of response to the actuality of suffering and evil, can strongly generate consolation that can be equally considered a practical response to evil and suffering in the world. Also, Julian's theoretical resolution on eschatology provides not only the possibility of healing and hope to afflicted people but also the motivation for a practical response to suffering and evil in the world. Julian shows us how theological reflection can effectively respond to existential dilemmas that are, to some extent, intellectual without rejecting theoretical theodicy. In the next section, I will continue to explore Julian's method of synthesis that integrates theoretical and practical theodicy and its positive implications for contemporary theodical issues through the exploration of how Julian's theology of integration is structured within her whole project.

4. Conclusion: Integrating Theoretical and Practical Theodicy

In the previous section, we recognized that Julian indirectly provided a cogent response to the problem of abandoning theoretical theodicy. Julian's final theoretical responses to the problem of suffering leads us to be confident that theoretical theodicy is not a potential source of evil in and of itself, but rather can bring healing and a deeper love for God, which is clearly revealed in her theoretical project on eschatology.

Jantzen essentially characterizes Julian as "an outstanding example of an integrated theologian, for whom daily life and religious experience and theological

reflection are all aspects of the same whole.”⁴⁶³ Jantzen outlines three methods articulated by Julian to effect her theological method of integration: the use of natural reason, the teachings of the Church, and the grace-giving operation of the Holy Spirit. These methods are the criteria by which a doctrine can be understood and evaluated. Julian says,

The first is the use of man’s natural reason. The second is the common teaching of Holy Church. The third is the inward grace-giving operation of the Holy Spirit; and these three are all from one God. God is the foundation of our natural reason; and God is the teaching of Holy Church, and God is the Holy Spirit, and they are all different gifts, and he wants us to have great regard for them, and accord ourselves to them.⁴⁶⁴

To Julian, these three methods for understanding are none other than the search for faith, which is closely related to the religious experience in Christian daily life and provides meaning to their experience. Julian’s theological methods are never separate from religious experience. That is, for Julian, learning and experience are integrated. The ‘experience’ that Julian has in mind not only means unusual visions and words from God but also includes the daily experience of the love of God, which leads us to a transformative knowing of ourselves and responding faithfully to the love of God, which in turn helps us respond to others. Julian’s meaning of ‘experience’ is thus understood as “both a basis from which we better understand doctrine, and a practical consequence of that understanding, as we discover in our

⁴⁶³ Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), 91.

⁴⁶⁴ Julian, *Showings*, 80. 335.

daily lives the truth of God's love and delight."⁴⁶⁵ Jantzen, revealing that Julian's approach is consistently shaped by monastic spirituality, which never left experience out of account, said Julian's "learning and experience were integrated," and "[her] reading was not simply the assimilation of information and ideas, but was itself prayer, *lectio divina*."⁴⁶⁶

It is important to recognize that it is living in correspondence to the love of God that makes for the right use of our natural reason and the teachings of the Church. Namely, for Julian, reason and experience are combined with the teachings of the Church, and all three are adjusted by the love of God as revealed in the cross of Christ. The central focus of Julian's theological investigation is grounded squarely in the passion of Christ, which had the effect of unifying the various dimensions of Julian's life and thought. We need to pay attention to the fact that Julian's dimensions of the love of God as revealed in the passion of Christ transform some of the traditional Christian doctrines, particularly in terms of the problems of sin and suffering.

⁴⁶⁵ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 105.

⁴⁶⁶ Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian*, 104. Jantzen contrasts the theological methods of monastic theology and scholastic theology: "Both drew upon patristic and scriptural writings and the teaching of the Church; and both emphasized the use of natural reason as Julian also did. But, contrary to scholastic practice," she cites Dom Jean Leclercq's account, "What individualizes monastic thought is a certain dependence on experience. Scholastic theology, on the other hand, puts experience aside . . . Its reflection is not rooted in experience and is not necessarily directed toward it. It is placed, deliberately, on the plane of metaphysics; it is impersonal and universal." See Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 278-279. Quoted in Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich*, 104.

For the most part, Julian is not only interested in reconciling the fact of human sinfulness with faith in the omnipotence of God but also in harmonizing the suffering of humanity with faith in the love of God. We can say that Julian's work is basically pastoral in its design, concretizing the abstract character of theoretical theodicy through Julian's capability to involve herself existentially in those persistent problems of sin and God's providential power. To Julian, "knowing the love of God" is the essential remedy for the perennial problem of spiritual despondency. As Julian considers many questions that feelings of spiritual depression are likely to provoke, she further deals with more encompassing issues related to God's ultimate power and providence, the metaphysics of sin, and the meaning of judgment. In the meantime, we need to be aware that Julian shows herself to be an heir of the scholastic method in her use of dialectic to unravel apparent contradictions. When "experience" and "faith" seem to clash, the careful and repeated application of critical distinctions eventually harmonizes the dissonances.⁴⁶⁷ An example of this is clearly displayed in her theological breakthrough, that is, her awakening of the identification between Christ and Adam (humans) in the parable of the Lord and the Servant through which she could offer a rationale, compelling both theologically and psychologically, for the experience of spiritual desolation.

As I revealed Chapter 2, some scholars claim that theoretical theodicy needs to be reclaimed in order for it to be effective theodicy. They recognize that

⁴⁶⁷ Julia Gatta, "Julian of Norwich: Theodicy as Pastoral Art," *Anglican Theological Review*, 63 no. 2 (April 1981): 179-180.

some effective themes of theoretical theodicy are required to properly support pastoral concerns. They contend that theodicy needs to draw more on particular resources of the Christian faith, such as the Cross, the resurrection of Christ, and belief in an afterlife. They also argue that theodicists have to show how better reflection can provide answers to existential dilemmas that are partly intellectual without rejecting theoretical theodicy. Accordingly, effective theodicy needs a paradigm of integration of theoretical and practical theodicy. It needs to maintain the integral aspects of theoretical theology that make a practical response to evil possible, while ensuring that the response to suffering and evil does not encourage the theological distortions and social evils that are identified by critics of theoretical theodicy.

Julian's theology of the Cross and eschatological approach has a positive bearing on the contemporary theodical issue of destructive suffering by providing theological and pastoral significance, especially on the integration of theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy. By drawing upon particular resources of the Christian faith, such as the Cross and the belief in an afterlife, Julian involves some compelling themes of theoretical theodicy. Julian's emphasis on the cross of Christ and eschatological dimensions urges us to rethink the contemporary issues of theodicy especially in regard to the problem of destructive suffering, by rejecting the traditional theistic worldview that all the evils and sufferings of humanity are a consequence of and punishment for sin. Julian does not neglect the innocent victims of destructive suffering; rather, she shows that her theology responds compassionately to victims of destructive suffering. Her eschatological dimension also shows this clearly by questioning the traditional doctrine of hell and the

retributive justice theme. Julian is theoretically against traditional ideas of punishment where all suffering is connected with the retributive justice of God and is vindicated as justice for our sin. Instead, Julian has a strong teleological and eschatological view of theodicy, where evil and suffering will finally be overcome in the ultimate fulfillment of God's intentions for us as a loving God.

Julian's theodicy indirectly rejects critics' argument that theoretical theodicy cannot provide the hope or possibility of healing to afflicted people. We have seen that Christ on the Cross provides a profound feeling of kindred spirit to suffering people through the religious experience of divine consolation and presence. It is sharing the experiential knowledge of their own afflictions with Christ's that mysteriously consoles afflicted people in a radically healing way. Also, we recognize that Julian's hope that, at the end of time, "all shall be well" pertains to people who trust that divine power and love can bring all into eternal fulfillment; furthermore, Julian's eschatology can provide the hope for the possibility of healing of afflicted people, especially those who are plagued with sin-obsessed fear of punishment. We need to pay attention to the fact that Julian shifts her emphasis away from God as the angry judge of damnation toward God as a most compassionate being who acts to make all things well. In the end, Julian's divine compassion revealed in the resurrection event and her eschatological dimension have a strong pastoral thrust that hopes for healing and recovery from the effects of destructive suffering. Considering these two points together, we can recognize that Julian's theological emphasis proffers a positive integration of theoretical and pastoral/practical theodicy.

Another example of Julian's theology of integration is revealed in her interconnected views of gender, the body, and sin. There, Julian ensures that the response to suffering and evil does not encourage theological distortions and social evils, which are identified by some critics of theoretical theodicy. As discussed in Chapter 3, Julian's theology overcomes the traditional hierarchy of soul over body. She understands humanity holistically as a psychosomatic unity, as body and soul together. Jantzen thus comprehends Julian's spirituality as an integrated and embodied spirituality, insisting that her spirituality "brings the whole of the self, sensuality included, into the unity of the love of God."⁴⁶⁸ Julian furthermore breaks the traditional negative associations of woman with the body, the Fall, and sin, which was an oppressive tool that caused much suffering for women—namely, a kind of destructive suffering socially constructed in the religious tradition. Julian values the body and/or defines sin in a manner that does not implicate sexuality as bearing the penalty of sin or women as being more responsible for sin than men. Julian thus avoids many of the criticisms that some pastoral theodacists have raised against some traditional themes of theoretical theodicy. Julian's theology of integration provides an appealing theoretical groundwork for her pastoral concerns, which also contributes to contemporary discussions about the possible relationship between pastoral and theoretical themes of theodicy.

We have seen that Julian's spiritual theology can provide a compelling example of integration of theoretical and practical theodicy. Julian begins with

⁴⁶⁸ Grace Jantzen, *Power Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 149.

experience, delineates emotional tangles and intellectual perplexities, and then surpasses subjectivity to seek an intellectual or theoretical resolution within the larger framework of Christian doctrine. So Julian's peculiar way of integrating theoretical and practical theodicy might provide positive and constructive implications for contemporary theodicy.

Conclusion

This thesis focuses on the spiritual theology of Julian of Norwich and its relevance and implications for the ongoing issues in contemporary theodicy. By exposition and analysis of this ongoing debate and the discussion between theoretical and pastoral theodicy, this thesis clarifies three important theodical issues. Julian's specific themes of spiritual theology provide a helpful resource as well as positive, constructive implications for all three major issues raised in contemporary theodicy.

It is Julian's peculiar theological methodology that creatively provides significant contributions to the examination of contemporary theodical issues. Julian's *Showings* is the product of a creative dynamic that exists between mystical experience and theological quest. It is thus important to recognize that both aspects of Julian, namely, that of a mystic and a theologian, inseparably intertwine one with the other. When Julian deals with feelings of spiritual despondency or depression, she addresses more encompassing issues in the manner in which she questions God's ultimate power and beneficence, the problem of sin, and the meaning of judgment. She tries to reconcile human sinfulness with faith in an all-powerful God and harmonize the suffering of humanity with a strong faith in all-loving God.

Julian's main intent in *Showings* is to interpret her visionary experiences into an intelligible story of God's love, which she hopes will comfort to her and her fellow Christians who were facing a devastating time. Julian's work is emphatically pastoral in its design, but in a way where she involves herself

theoretically with solving what she sees as the vexing problems of sin and Providence. Julian achieves this remarkable synthesis by honoring the experiential evidence of her vision, and combining it with the illuminative authority of her own reason. Such an astonishing theology is the contact point that offers both further significance and implications for the contemporary issues of theodicy.

Julian was a fourteenth-century English mystic who was profoundly concerned with suffering and the nature of sin. Considering her context and position in a medieval world, she would have witnessed unspeakable suffering, fear, and death. She also would have been told that suffering and evil were direct punishments from God, brought on mankind by sin. In Julian's times, traditional theology made a major effort to defend God from bearing any responsibility for evil. That theology justified God's punishment of sinners and blamed those sinners who freely chose to disobey God's commands. The theology of the time was characterized as both judicial and retributive.

Indeed, it is astounding that Julian was troubled by this accepted theology of retribution. She was upset by the theological depiction of God as wrathful. Without denying human sinfulness, Julian refused to describe God as wrathful toward sinners. The pivotal insight that characterizes Julian's theology is a distinction between the divine and the human perspective. Julian arrives at a new understanding to explain the problem of sin in light of divine love. When viewed from the divine perspective, sin has no place; it has no being in eternity, and thus it cannot thwart God's salvific plans. Especially, by turning her attention to the Lord's perspective in her parable, Julian realizes that the original transgression of human beings is presented as an inadvertent separation from God rather than a

deliberate act of rebellion. She found that the God portrayed in that parable is a loving and merciful God who does not look down upon sinners in anger.

The most pressing issue for Julian was how to comprehend the nature of God, while recognizing that God was not only all-knowing and all-powerful, but also all-loving. Julian regards sin from an eschatological perspective and explores its function in the divine plan. Julian's theodical project is teleological, which focuses more on the purpose and the ends of evil, rather than etiological, which is concerned with the causes and consequences of that evil. Julian's teleological structure of theology stands in conspicuous contrast to the juridical paradigm of the theological response to the problem of evil and suffering. So she is able to avoid the criticisms that are raised in contemporary theodicy against extreme retributive themes of theodicy. Julian's purpose in writing on the revelations of God's love is to comfort her fellow Christians who are besieged by their guilt for sin and their fear of a wrathful God. For Julian, those negative feelings are totally in conflict with authentic Christian hope for and faith in an all-embracing loving God who cares about them.

Julian's understanding of the nature of God closely connects to her theme of human nature. Especially, Julian's understanding of the human body provides an interesting theoretical underpinning for her pastoral concerns and indeed contributes in an interesting way to contemporary discussions about the possible relationship between the pastoral and theoretical themes of theodicy. For Julian, the body is sacred because the body is co-substantial with the body of Jesus Christ and the residence of the divine. Julian's positive valuation of the body and its sensuality signifies that the body is cherished by and enfolded in the all encompassing love of

God. Julian's spirituality is an integrated and embodied spirituality because she "brings the whole of the self, sensuality included, into the unity of the love of God."⁴⁶⁹

Julian's understanding of human nature also implies that the body, and women as well, are not inferior and must not be associated with sin. Julian constructs a theological anthropology that values the body and/or defines sin in a manner that does not implicate sexuality as bearing the penalty for sin or women as being more responsible than men for sin. Julian breaks with the traditional association of the body with women and sin. In the end, we recognize that Julian's understanding of human nature has a positive bearing on the problem of suffering and pain, especially as it has been traditionally imposed upon women, which is a kind of destructive suffering that is socially constructed in the Christian tradition.

Julian's parable of "the lord and the servant" becomes the key to Julian's solution for the problem of the nature of evil. Through the image of the lord in her parable, Julian emphasizes God's loving fidelity to creation and also God's homely, courteous and compassionate love. Her image of the lord illustrates how God relates to humankind in times of suffering. It is a portrait of a God of pathos who is steadfast in love and both sincere and empathetic, a quite distant representation from a traditional depiction of an impassible God. Through acceptance of Julian's possible response to the problem of a suffering God, we recognize that Christ's Incarnation and His Passion can provide a need for a transcendent fellow sufferer,

⁴⁶⁹ Grace Jantzen, *Power Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 149.

while the image of a responsive, compassionate God offers hope from desolation and the discouragement we feel in light of ongoing evil and suffering. Julian's approach provides new perspectives on the arguments of contemporary passibilists and offers positive implications for the contemporary question of the nature of God, as it relates to human suffering.

In her personal reflections on the parable, Julian found that Christ who incorporated all humanity into himself is also our true Mother, and she understands that the one and triune God is our Mother. Julian uses the image of Christ's motherhood to reveal the real, absolute, and unbreakable union between Christ and humanity. It is from this union that she senses that God was never wrathful and never will be toward sinners. This Christological principle contributed to Julian's unique and even courageous theological affirmation that motherhood is an essential nature of God. The analogy of Christ, our Mother, is central to Julian's response to the problem of suffering. We recognize that Julian's spiritual theology is essentially a theology of compassion toward the victims of suffering for their very suffering. Julian's divine-compassion response to suffering "differs from that of some Christians who deliberately or inadvertently take apathetic, sadistic, or masochistic stances toward suffering."⁴⁷⁰

Julian's spiritual theology also responds to the question of the destructive suffering of people through placing her emphasis on the passion of Christ and

⁴⁷⁰ Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation* (New York and Houndsmills, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 101.

proposing eschatological hope. Julian explains that her vision of the crucified Christ can be seen as an icon, namely, Christ's abiding solidarity with a suffering humanity. Julian suggests that the pain reflected on the dying body of Christ is indeed His divine love suffering with us. Christ's sharing of human suffering makes clearly explicit that human beings are in relationship with a God who enfolds us all in love. Julian's vivid images of the suffering of Christ thus powerfully convey the solidarity with the suffering of the humanity.

Julian introduces her reflection on the meaning of the cross into the discussion of the ever-present problem of how to explain evil and suffering. This Christological approach to theodicy is unique and interesting. In addition, the image of a compassionate God gives one further confidence that all will be well, which provides eschatological hope. Julian's framework exhibits the characteristics normally associated with authentic Christian hope: "All will be well, and you will see it yourself, that every kind of thing will be well. And then will the bliss of our motherhood in Christ be to begin anew in the joys of our Father, God, which new beginning will last, newly beginning without end."⁴⁷¹ We can see that Julian's hope is, as Anna Maria Reynolds explains, based on "the goodness, love and reliability of God as revealed in scripture and in the person of Christ." This theological aspect of Julian's hope "makes Julian supremely relevant to today's fearful and threat-ridden world."⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Julian, *Showings*, 63. 305.

⁴⁷² Anna Maria Reynolds, "Julian of Norwich: Woman of Hope," *Mystics Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Sep 1984): 124.

Although Julian's theodicy is basically theoretical and contemplative, it does not remain one of mere theoretical concern. Her approaches are very concerned with practical dimensions with an emphasis placed on religious experience, often ignored by theoretical theodacists. Julian's theoretical responses to the problem of suffering show that theoretical theodicy is not a potential source of evil in and of itself. Rather, Julian embraces the compelling themes of theoretical theodicy by drawing on very particular resources of the Christian faith, the cross and the belief in an afterlife. Through these resources, Julian is able to show that her theology does not neglect the innocent victims of destructive suffering, but rather, responds compassionately to those victims.

In addition, Julian's theodical project counters critics' arguments that theoretical theodicy cannot provide any hope or possibility of healing to afflicted people. We have seen that Christ on the cross provides that hope and also a powerful healing process to suffering people through the religious experience of divine consolation and presence. Julian's eschatology also provides the hope and possibility of healing to afflicted people, especially regarding the belief that evil and suffering will finally be overcome in the ultimate fulfillment of God's intentions for mankind as a loving God. Together, these two points strongly suggest that Julian's spiritual theology is a compelling example of the successful integration of theoretical and practical theodicy, maintaining the integral aspects of theoretical theology that make a practical response to evil possible.

Julian does not solve the problem of evil and suffering, nor does she approach it in systematic and philosophical ways. That is not her concern. Julian is mainly concerned about the nature of God's love in relation to human sin and

suffering by examining her own mystical experiences and theological reflection on them, which provided her with a unique theological breakthrough for responding to the problem of sin and suffering. Julian's effort to vindicate the beneficent care of God in the context of human suffering provides psychological, pastoral, and theological consolation, and offers hope to people who are experiencing severe suffering. In this way, Julian definitely contributes in positive ways to the significant issues raised between contemporary theoretical and practical theodicy, by responding intelligently and consistently to them.

There are additional issues worthwhile to pursue in further study on this discussion of Julian's approach to the problem of evil and suffering. There is the question for how Julian could specifically respond or contribute to certain issues for theoretical theodicy that this thesis does not develop, such as the questions of impaired freedom and the possibility of better possible worlds, and issues related to traditional views of purgatory, hell, and the depth and scope of natural evil.

Another issue for further interesting exploration is Julian's response to the problem of social or institutional evils, especially how Julian's main themes of spiritual theology, especially her theology of passion and compassion, might provide positive theological implications and solutions for that problem.

As a female mystical theologian, Julian's spiritual theology provides a compelling and convincing contribution to the theodical effort to vindicate the beneficent care of God in the context of the existence of evil and suffering. We see that Julian's understanding of the nature of God in relation to human suffering illustrates the active beneficence of the Divine, which I think makes Julian's work a compelling treatment of various themes of theodicy. Julian's work represents a

powerful example of mystical theodicy and a cogent and comforting perspective on the challenge of evil. In this respect, further study might explore how mystical theodicy goes beyond non-mystical treatments in contemporary theodicy.

Finally, Julian's work might be read more openly, as offering themes of theodicy that do not resolve the problem, but which are dynamically open-ended. However, clearly, Julian's spiritual theology and her peculiar way of integrating themes of theoretical and practical theodicy provide positive, constructive implications for many issues of contemporary theodicy. Julian's spiritual theology provides a cogent and engaging example of theodicy that is clearly sensitive to the human experiences of suffering along with a fundamental Christian belief that God is most active love.

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