

The Texts of the Convivium

GOD AND EVIL

It is said that God is almighty and, at the same time, perfectly good. One expects a “good” creation, moreover as it is defined right from the first pages of the Bible, from an almighty and good God.

However, we have then noticed how creation, on the contrary, is so full of evil. And we may well ask ourselves: “So does this therefore mean that God works evil? But how could this be possible, seeing as He is infinitely good?”

At this point, many theologians distinguish: “God does not do evil, but He permits it”. Does this kind of distinction not risk being subtly hypocritical?

In order to propose a human example: a child risked drowning in a fountain, I stood by and watched as he fell into the fountain and drowned. I was not to blame. It wasn't me who threw him in! Needless to say, I did nothing to stop him. I allowed the inevitable to happen. What's wrong with that?

One says: “How can we apply the rules of our human action to that of God's?” Or rather: “God's will is mysterious, His plans are inscrutable”. It would be better to totally suspend judgement, rather than to make a stab at rash answers and then interrupt the subject on their possible implications (since it is mysterious), leaving those alleged solutions to stand as if they were the final word. It would be better to abstain from uttering such foolishness.

As far as certain matters are concerned, silence is precious when one does not know what to say. However, men, and maybe even more so, women, do not know how to keep quiet, since they have this invincible need to excogitate consolatory explanations. They call it “accepting the inevitable”, even if, more often than not, it concerns authentic nonsense.

“May Your will be done”, says an old fashioned religious man, even before the raging of so much evil. “I'll be damned!” is a reply only seemingly blasphemous.

I need a God to love; but, first of all, I need a God whom I don't have to curse.

I abhor blasphemy. However, I acknowledge that it strongly expresses the repudiation of the obsolete image of a God who sends us all kinds of sufferance and evil, or, if they afflict us, does not free us of them, but remains an impassable spectator.

God is good. He is the only real good. He is completely and utterly good right through to the end and in infinite measures. Due to His nature, God only wants all good.

God does not accept evil, He does not want it nor does He permit it, but he opposes and fights it, until His kingdom comes, where good triumphs in a total and absolute manner.

If God does not want evil, then how come this pervades the present situation in such a dramatic, if not tragic manner? Does this mean to say that the Divinity is impotent? On the contrary, I would rather say that it is crucified.

Certainly not crucified in itself, in its absolute dimension, but in its presence amongst us: in this sense, crucified by us.

A crucified God could scandalise he who would like God to be triumphant in every moment and at all levels. However, should a Christian not already be a little initiated to such an idea? The only thing missing is that he plucks up the courage to carry it out right through to the end.

Are we saying that God is limited? Certainly not in Himself and in origin, but He could limit Himself of His own imitative. And why would He do this? For the logic itself of creation.

And this is, I repeat, never in His absoluteness, but only in manifesting Himself in the ambit of the relative. As I was saying: in His making Himself present among us. And obviously, also in us.

Placing into being not imaginary, but consistent, autonomous creatures, means giving them space. And one cannot give space to a creature without limiting one's own space.

Creating always means drawing back.

Creating means accepting to coexist with the creature.

Creating means giving the creature that freedom, which it can use as it wishes: good or bad, mediocre, wretched, or, on the contrary, excellent and sublime.

"Lord God, if Your creation could have made such a bad use of its freedom, with such a terrible corollary of problems, then why did You not arrange things otherwise? Is it not true that You are omniscient? Is it not true that You foresee all possibilities? Is it not true that You could have planned a much better world than this?" Although it may come spontaneous to us, this is an incorrect metaphysical issue, because it starts from an accentuated anthropomorphic representation of God.

It is of no avail God answering he who dares criticise creation in this manner: "Small worm of the earth, would you be able to create such a great universe?" The little man, in his turn, could answer: "Needless to say I would have made it much smaller, but, if I may say so, much better".

He who affirms that, out of all the possibilities, God chooses one, the one He wants, to transform it into progress, hypothesises that there is a succession of at least two moments in Him: one that precedes, in which God considers the possibilities; therefore a subsequent moment, in which He decides and places the pre-chosen possibility into being. However, there is no succession in God whatsoever, as He resolves every one of His actions in the absolute simplicity of a one and only eternal act.

God cannot decide to create one world rather than another different one. He cannot "decide" in general. To decide is an exclusively human action. A God who decides is an anthropomorphic representation.

God is Love, the creation is an act of love. Infinite Love, God can only donate Himself in an act of limitless love. Creation is the infinite gift that God makes of Himself. Therefore it is "good", like God Himself: infinitely good and perfect. However, the perfect goodness of creation will only be revealed in the end, when it will have achieved its ultimate goal.

Evil is caused by the creatures' negative resistance.

Creatures are free and can, therefore, resist the creative action, although they receive existence and life from it. In resisting God's creative action, the creatures harm themselves. To obey means life, to disobey the Creator and turn one's back on Him means death.

Only by converting themselves can the creatures collaborate in the completion of creation. God needs men. He needs every creature's cooperation. He needs everyone's conversion, so that the creative process can achieve its ultimate goal.

Unfortunately evil exists; and it is so evil that it even crucifies the divine presence in this world.

Three very different classical attitudes have as protagonists three different kinds of men: the first is the man of the most immature and naive religiousness, who looks for, or hypothesises certainties everywhere; the second is the atheist, who works without any certainty whatsoever, in a horizon in which everything will be made futile in the

end; the third is the most conscious and mature religious man, who works without any certainties for the present, but is certain of a final triumph of the kingdom of God, which he himself knows he is contributing to.

The immature religiousness needs certainties at all costs. It therefore prefers to trust itself to a God who is already perfectly almighty, even if of a dubious morality. In order to get on the right side of such a God, it is enough to act well according to a determined code, or it is enough to flatter Him in the manner which such a Sovereign is more sensitive to: and man will be able to obtain all protection from Him. But what certainty could a crucified God guarantee his devotee? Final victory belongs to Him, but for the time being he does not offer any certainty: and this is why an immature religious mentality cannot even stand such an idea.

Immaturity cannot stand the idea of unavoidable evil. It needs to see an avoidable evil in it: evil that has been deserved by bad deeds that can be avoided in the future. Or rather, it needs to see evil in it that is wisely dosed for good purposes. Evil without mitigation, pure evil, real evil is something which immaturity cannot even tolerate the thought of.

The answer one could give to he who affirms that certain things are impossible for God, is that He is almighty and can therefore do everything. The counter-reply: He can indeed do everything, except contradict Himself.

A contradiction of the absolute divine simplicity would be not only that God acted in a temporal succession of moments, but that He carried out a plurality of actions at the same time.

If God decides to create - for example - the erect man, the four-legged horse with hooves and mane, the black raven with wings made in that manner, the hammer-head shark whose head is formed in that curious shape and its fins etc. etc., if He had to devise all this variety of structure one by one, with such a multiple thought, it would contradict its own absolute simplicity.

God cannot do *first* this and *then* that, and neither this *and* that together. The creatures' multiplicity is explained with a multiple action, which cannot only be the absolutely simple one of God.

God indeed contributes to each single existing creature with His unique creative action which gives foundation to everything, but furthermore, the many different actions of con-creating creatures also contribute.

Let us imagine an immense waterfall that is always the same, which gives rise to many more or less winding rivers, streams and brooks. From what is each water course placed into being with all its flowing up and down? From the waterfall of course, but also from the varying nature of the terrain.

Every creature has a mother and a father. If the father is the eternal God, the mother could be the contingent situation, which imprints its specific form onto the new creature.

How can God know so many things together? Things receive their being from the eternal act of God which basically creates them, but they then obtain the different modalities of their existence from the varied actions, which are different when not conflictual, of countless con-creating creatures. And God does nothing else but give a sense of being to everything with a unique act of consciousness.

God gives a sense of being, with a unique act of consciousness, to the multiplicity of becoming things, in the same way as the light of a magic lantern illuminates the film projecting the many images onto a screen. These images, that are so multiple in their coexistence and their following one after another, take their light of being from a unique light that is always the same.

The first origin of everything is God in His absolute simplicity. God founds every reality and event. However, not everything is attributable to Him in a specific manner. Above all, that which is attributable to multiple, becoming, contingent, relative and imperfect causes.

God makes everything divinely. Therefore, He is also infinite in His self-donation.

In the infinity of His self-donation, divine Love overcomes all obstacles. So, at its completion, the divine creation is perfect.

How can one say that creation is perfect, before the vision of so much evil? One will see it in the end, when all evil is sublimed in the total and definitive triumph of Good.

God's almightiness should be understood in the sense that, in the end, He can do everything, because the final victory is His. He can indeed do everything, at the end of time; but not in the course of the time, in which He is incarnated, from which He is conditioned.

Here and now, in this world and the present contingency, God is weak and crucified. This is the place of God's *kénosis*, of His "emptying".

The kingdom of God is not of this world; and yet the Christian invocation is "Thy kingdom come, on earth (which is the place of His present crucifixion) as it is on heaven (the place of God's absoluteness)".

A God crucified by His creation does not guarantee us "everything and immediately", but it prepares us a paradise of supreme perfection and endless happiness which goes beyond all our expectations and hopes as men, beyond any good we can even only imagine.

How can we not give everything to a God who gives us everything?

Before a God who in perspective gives us all good, how can we not be lavish in the highest expressions of acknowledgement and praise?