

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

DEPARTMENT OF SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Solving the Problem of Evil

STEPHEN GALDO  
Spring 2014

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for a baccalaureate degree in Management Information Systems  
with honors in English

Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Joshua Shaw  
Associate Professor of Philosophy  
Thesis Adviser

Craig Warren  
Associate Professor of English and Professional Writing  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## **ABSTRACT**

Nothing has posed a greater challenge to Christianity than the problem of evil. How could an omnipotent, omniscient, and all good God permit evil? Why is there so much evil? Why is there pointless evil? God where are you? God are you real? These are questions I address in this thesis. In the first section, I address what I believe to be the most compelling challenges to faith in God: the logical, natural, and gratuitous problems of evil. I offer compelling arguments against the non-believer's challenges: the existence of free will, greater goods result, and God's attempt to use suffering to draw us into a personal relationship with him. In the second section, I share my personal experience with evil and suffering. I take a closer look at how God used suffering to lead me to an intimate relationship with him in my high school and college years. In the third and final section, I illustrate the power of having faith when encountering evil. I talk more about my personal approach to suffering and how I find meaning within it. Then I analyze popular misconceptions about Christianity's views of suffering and explain that Christianity is ultimately a response of love to suffering.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	v
Critical Preface .....	iv
Chapter 1 Philosophic Problem of Evil.....	1
The Logical Problem of Evil.....	3
Natural Problem of Evil .....	7
The Problem of Gratuitous Evil .....	9
Conclusion .....	13
Chapter 2 My Story: Unconditional Joy .....	15
Exemplary Parents .....	15
Interior Reflections: Growing Up .....	17
Finding a Purpose: High School Track .....	21
The Turning Point .....	24
Chapter 3 The Call to Suffering.....	31
Redemptive Suffering .....	31
My Call to Suffering .....	34
Unhealthy Relationship with Pain and Suffering in Religion .....	41
The Seventh Seal.....	43
The Passion of Christ .....	45
Christianity: a Response of Love .....	47
Appendix.....	51
Scripture Meditations.....	51
Notes .....	54
Works Cited .....	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	59

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Lord, it's a good thing you qualify the called, because I certainly was not qualified to write this thesis. Father, I hope this work gives you all the glory. Thank you for the gift of life, for the gift of knowing you, for all the grace you have bestowed on me, your little child. Lord I have nothing but gratitude to express, you truly have spoiled me in unimaginable ways.

Thank you Professor Joshua Shaw for encouraging me during this process. Thank you for guiding my work and making sure that I stayed in the right direction. Thank you for patiently putting up with my confusion, narrow mindedness, and lack of philosophical understanding. Professor Shaw, you were the man who fought in the trenches with me. Thank you for challenging me. You will always hold a special place in my heart.

Thank you Michael Brown for leading me to the Schreyer honors program and encouraging me along my college journey.

Thank you Professor Gamble and Professor Warren for supporting me and working with the honors college to make this thing happen.

Thank you Mom and Dad for all the love, sacrifice, and opportunities you have continued to provide for me. I would not have this opportunity if it was not for your efforts. I hope this thesis brings you peace and joy!

Thank you Michael, Msgr Biebel, Bonnie, Marissa, Cheyenne, Kyle, Gill, Sam, Tom, Brian and all you crazy friends and Newman people who prayed for me.

## Critical Preface

**God:** Stephen, “I have called you by name: you are mine (*New American Bible*, Is. 43:1). Fear not, I am with you. Do not be anxious. I will strengthen you and I will help you (*New American Bible*, Is. 41:10). My son, if your heart is wise, my own heart will also rejoice (*New American Bible*, Prv. 23:15). What I am doing, you do not understand now, but you will understand later (*New American Bible*, Jn. 13:7). Remain in me as I remain in you (*New American Bible*, Jn. 15:4).”

**Me:** “Lord, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar (*New American Bible*, Ps. 139:1-2). Even before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you know it all. Hear me, Lord and answer me (*New American Bible*, Ps. 86:1). Why have you abandoned me (*New American Bible*, Ps. 22:1)? Such knowledge is beyond me, far too lofty for me to reach (*New American Bible*, Ps. 139:6).”

I was walking to my car on a below zero morning before heading in to work. The cold wind was bone-chilling and I was doing my usual practice of offering up my pain from the cold winter weather for souls in purgatory. I thought to myself: “What am I going to write about for my Senior Thesis?” Then it hit me, my faith! My faith had become the center of my life. This all came to be after a set of powerful conversion experiences my sophomore year of college. This was the greatest discovery that I experienced in college: Jesus Christ was a real person. Clearly, my heart was moving me to discuss this in some context. I could already hear the objections of doing a thesis outside of my major, but I knew this was my personal thesis. Thankfully, we were encouraged by the school to do something of great personal interest. Initially, my thought was to explain difficult Catholic concepts like purgatory or Mary the Mother of Jesus. Instead, after

meeting with Professor Shaw and listening to his suggestions, I saw my interest peeking in suffering. Suffering had been something I had been questioning since my childhood. Why does it exist? What does it do? How do we handle it? I was always under the impression that in the long run it brought about a greater good. However, I started questioning if my personal beliefs about suffering were correct and in standing with the church. I now had a personal relationship with God and I wondered what insights I would gain as I walked with him during this thesis.

In *Chapter 1* I explore the problem of evil from a mixture of philosophical and personal perspectives. First, I will discuss the logical problem of evil: How can an omnipotent, omniscient, and all loving God permit evil? I will respond to this potential problem by using free will as my basis to explain the occurrence of evil. In God's infinite love, he gives his children freedom. Then I will examine the common non-believer question: why can't God create a world with free will, but no evil? From there, I will attempt to explain why in my opinion a world with free will and no evil, is truly not free.

Then I will explore the natural problem of evil. For those who suffer from natural disease, illness, or have experienced tragedy through a natural disaster, there is no one to put the blame on besides God. From there I will examine a common response from individuals like St Augustine and Alvin Plantinga, that it is very possible that evil forces cause natural evil. Then I will present arguments I believe to be personally more convincing: we label "evil" as evil and a greater good is brought through natural evil.

For the last part of *Chapter 1*, I will look at the strongest atheistic argument: the argument for the existence of meaningless evil. However, I will argue that our finite nature keeps us from the ability to make judgments with certainty about whether or not a greater good occurs. Another part of the gratuitous evil conundrum is the actual experience of evil. When one experiences a great evil, it becomes hard to reconcile belief in God within one's heart. To counter-act disbelief in God through the experience of evil, I will offer a unique solution: a

personal relationship with God. I will expound on my belief that God uses this experience of evil to lead the individual suffering to an intimate relationship with him.

In *Chapter 2* I share with the reader my personal triumph over suffering. I share my experience with suffering and how it motivated me to seek out a relationship with God. First, I share with the reader how my parents were great role models for handling suffering. Second, I share my trials with my faith as well as various other sins that led me away from God. Then I reflect on my high school and college experiences as I battle with seemingly pointless suffering and existential evil. Last, I talk about my experience working with those who are less fortunate and how this changes my heart. I make the claim that God, who is love, is the answer to suffering.

In *Chapter 3* I explore with the reader the concept of redemptive suffering. It's in this union of offering our pain as a prayer that a greater good occurs. Next, I share my vocational journey with the Franciscans and the interior trials I bore during my junior year of college. I talk about how my approach to suffering helps me face these trials in college. From there, I talk about a Saint who I believe to be one of the greatest models for how to deal with suffering: Saint Francis of Assisi. Francis suffered much in his life, but it eventually became nothing but joy for him. My discussion on the Christian (specifically Roman Catholic) approach to suffering might cause the reader to find an unhealthy relationship between pain and suffering in Christianity. It's then that I look more closely at how the Christian view of suffering is depicted in popular film. The two films I will jump into are: *The Seventh Seal* and *The Passion of Christ*. I will argue that Christians do not seek or fixate on suffering, but rather joyfully approach it as an opportunity to love. So sit back, buckle up, and hang on to your seat as we journey through the road marked with suffering.

## **Personal Faith**

I am a Christian, a follower of Christ, to be specific a Roman Catholic. For me Religion, or what I like to call my faith, is not an extracurricular activity, but rather a lifestyle. It's not about following a list of rules or performing a certain ritual, it's all about a relationship. Life is all about relationships! So, why would this be any different with our creator? I object with those who claim organized religion is not for them. You cannot really love Jesus and despise religion, because Jesus instituted religion during his public ministry: "Upon this rock I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (*New American Bible*, Matt. 16:18). There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. We are social human beings and we learn from each other. In the same notion, we worship together.

I desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and his holy gospel as closely as I can. To me, Jesus is a Father, not just a moral teacher or historical figure. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life" (*New American Bible*, Jn. 14:6) all meaning and hope is found in him. I view Faith as a gift from God, an invitation that is freely given. In most cases it does not fall out of the sky (unless you're Saint Paul), but is sought by the individual. I do not look down upon those who have no faith or try to avoid them. Rather I try in my weakness to love them. If faith is a gift, maybe they have not received it yet. The first thing said about love in the bible is that it is "patient" (*New American Bible*, 1 Cor. 13:4). As Christians it is not our mission to condemn, force, or guilt others into religion. Rather, it is an invitation, one of great love and joy. Faith is something that brings joy and peace to the individual.

Many "religious" people are so focused on salvation. Many cry out: "Will I be saved?" Yes, certainly this is an important question and I'm not discounting it. In fact, my mission in life, through God's grace and my efforts, is to save as many souls as possible. However, I would be quicker to tell someone to seek God because he is the source of life, not solely for the motivation of "being saved." To God our hearts are barcodes and our lungs are oxygen tanks. God can scan us; he knows our thoughts and our needs. God can also fill us; with life itself. We just have to ask



and make time! In Genesis Chapter 2 it says when God formed man he “blew into his nostrils the breathe of life, and so man became a living being” (*New American Bible*, Gn. 2:7). This is the Holy Spirit, the spirit we receive from prayer and worship. We come become filled with God’s spirit to love, to become the very best person we can be. We become more like God. The Saints of the church witness to this! Who doesn’t want to grow in love, to be the best they can be?

Yes, we have a good idea about how one can inherit eternal life and what it may be like; however, I cannot say I have been to heaven before. Once again, religion should not just be a checklist or a catchy advertisement: “This is how you get saved in 40 days!” So then why is faith so important? Because having a relationship with God changes your life. It makes everything all the more bearable. True Christians are joyful for absolutely no reason other than: “I know Jesus.” To some this may seem silly, but that’s the message I want to convey. As humans we all need to feel loved. God loves you! Look for him, talk to him, and surely you will encounter the divine love that is him.

### **Purpose of Work**

I previously mentioned that my faith is the most important part of my life. Therefore, I want the whole world to know God is real! With the help of Professor Shaw’s guidance and my own examination of the faith, I felt the problem of evil to be the greatest threat to modern Christianity. Almost weekly, friends approach me asking questions about why God permits horrific evils. I have noticed even in Christian circles, believers have trouble defending against the “why” and “so much” objections that atheists pose about evil. I started to see that there were objections being raised by atheists that I could not answer. Then I was delightfully surprised to see there were Christians like St. Augustine, John Paul II, Peter Kreft, C.S. Lewis, and St. Thomas Aquinas who have been writing extensively on this topic. After continuing to read over different theories from believers and atheists alike, I felt a desire to write on this topic. Perhaps

part of the reason is that in my personal experience suffering has led me and countless others to be closer to God. How could human suffering, which was leading people closer to God, now be used as evidence for his non-existence? I was on a mission to find the answer!

One of the many reasons I am a Christian is because Christians approach suffering head on, whereas other religions or ideologies try to escape suffering. Perhaps my masculinity is kicking in here, but I want to be the soldier on the front lines, not the guy doing everything he can to dodge the draft. Furthermore, I believe the Catholic Church has the greatest theological and philosophical answers explaining suffering, and, through the science of the saints, helps explain how we can approach suffering in our own lives.

There are many things I hope this thesis helps the reader with: first, a stronger faith in God, or a stronger reason to believe in God. Two, the reader should be better able to handle suffering in their own life. Three, the reader should have a better understanding of the problem of evil. Four, the reader should come to realize love can overcome all evil.

## Chapter 1

### Philosophic Problem of Evil

Why! Why! Why! The sobbing mother yells to the police officer when she is given news that her son was killed by a drunk driver. “How is this fair? Why my son?” During this moment of intense anger, frustration, and sorrow the human mind tries to come up with some sort of explanation for the outcome of the event. Like solving a math problem, there has to be a solution. However, there may not be. The darkness of the surrounding night consumes us with fear, anxiety, and so much suffering. Why so much suffering? This suffering leads us to the apex of all questions: “God where are you?”

In philosophy we call this conundrum the problem of evil. As Michael Peterson, philosophy professor at Asbury college says in his book *God and Evil* “the credibility of a religion is closely linked to its ability to give its adherents categories for thinking about the presence of evil” (Peterson, 7). Does the religion intuitively answer the *why* of evil? The religion I would like to focus on in this thesis is Christianity; most specifically Roman Catholicism. Some philosophers think evil poses a special problem for Christianity. As Brown goes on to say in his book “there seems to be a serious tension between Christian’s concept of God and Evil” (Peterson, 7). The problem of evil is most certainly the greatest weapon of atheists. Churches and Christian theologians have struggled to come up with answers as to why God permits suffering. David Hume, a Scottish philosopher of the 1700’s, has the most famous summary of the problem of evil: “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? What then is evil?” (Lane). Evil exists, or at least horrific and large cases of it, God seems to be on the sidelines. Thus God must

be less than God like. In summary, if God is omnipotent, omniscient, and all good, evil should not exist. In this section of the paper I plan to analyze common arguments for evil disproving the existence of God and common defenses for the existence of God in the face of evil. First I will analyze the logical problem of evil. To the atheist, what Christians attribute to a deity appears to have some flaws given the current nature of the human existence. I will argue that these potential flaws can be disproven by the existence of free will. The atheist then suggests that even with free will a better possible world could exist given an omniscient, omnipotent, all loving God. I will then counter this notion by attempting to convince the reader that other possible worlds would not have genuine free will. At the end, I will share how I see freewill and the existence of evil working in my own life. Second, I will analyze the threat of natural evil to the existence of God. The atheist argues that a perfectly loving God would not permit such horrific diseases and disaster to harm his children. I will use a greater goods theodicy to defend this threat to the existence of God. I will mainly argue that God allows natural evil to occur because of the natural order of the world and to bring about greater love among the human race. In addition, I will challenge the reader to acknowledge that it is precisely our moral judgment that defines natural evil as evil. Third, I will analyze the threat of gratuitous or meaningless evil. The atheist argues that many meaningless evils occur throughout ever day life. The fact that some evils have no greater meaning disproves the existence of God. I will argue that there is no such thing as meaningless evil in the eyes of God. I will take the position that in our finite minds we cannot possibly disprove that no good comes from evil. I will also examine the human experience of pointless evil and try to demonstrate how suffering provides an opportunity for a relationship with God.

To begin we must talk about classifying and defining evil. For the sake of brevity I allow the reader to use their own definition of evil, but I would make a distinction between moral and natural (physical) evil. Michael Peterson describes the distinction as the following: Moral evil

results from human actions and natural evil is any other type of evil (Peterson, 11). An example of moral evil would be murder whereas an example of natural evil would be natural disasters. Three popular atheistic arguments from evil, which attempt to disprove the existence of God, are the logical problem, the problem of natural evil, and evidential (“gratuitous evil”) problems (Peterson, 13). Below I plan analyze these arguments and theistic defenses.

### **The Logical Problem of Evil**

To some philosophers there appears to be a contradiction between Christianity’s claim about God and evil. As philosophers H.J. McCloskey and J.L. Mackie point out the following statements contradict each other:

1. God Exists
2. God is omnipotent
3. God is omniscient
4. God is perfectly good
5. Evil exists

(Beebe)

The argument alleges that there is a logical contradiction between God’s existence and evil’s existence. If God was omnipotent, he would be powerful enough to stop all the evil and suffering in the world. If God was omniscient, he would perceive and know about all of the evil and suffering in the world. If God was perfectly good, he would not permit evil and suffering to befall his children, but evil does exist. Thus God does not exist. Many believers argue that free will can reduce the apparent inconsistency with the existence of a good God and evil. God, who is

love himself, allows us to choose between right and wrong. love is freely giving without counting the cost, without expecting anything in return. Because “God is love” (New American Bible, 1 Jn. 4:8) he gives us freedom. God also gives us freedom because “God created man in his own image” (New American Bible, Gn. 1:27). God is free, therefore, we must be too. Peterson explains this kind of “free will” theodicy using some of St Augustine’s arguments, in the following way:

“We must not believe that God gave us free will so that we might sin, just because sin is created through free will. The point is that our humanity is of great value and free will is necessary. We have moral significance because we can act right or wrongly. God cannot give us the power to make morally right choices without giving us the power to make morally wrong ones as well. So, to have the good of humanity we must have evil” (Peterson, 34).

It’s important to note that God does not force us to serve him. This is perfect love. God certainly hopes we unite ourselves to his plan, but he seeks those who come on their own accord. It means a lot to human beings when we see our fellow neighbor go out of their way for us. In the same way, it means a lot to a father when he sees his own child obeying him. The child is not forced to do this, but rather does it out of love for the Father. The way we go out of our way for our neighbor and the way we follow God’s commands is the way we love God. Furthermore, I would like to illustrate God’s gift of freedom to us by the following example: imagine the task of raising a child. As your son or daughter grows up, you correct them when they do things wrong and try to shape them into the best person they can be. Eventually in your son or daughters life there comes a point where they have to choose for themselves the person they want to be. Hopefully, by this point they have the knowledge and preparedness to carry out their journey.

They can leave the house and live life their “own way” or they can follow the path you set out for them which should (if you’re a good parent) lead to happiness. Such is the same with God’s role in our natural development, as we age and grow older we theoretically should grow in maturity. We are faced with bigger responsibilities, our power over others increases, and our personal freedom increases. Thus, even after our development we can cast aside all the wisdom, knowledge, and love we’ve acquired throughout our lives. We can participate in that which is morally evil.

However, atheists reject this claim by saying that it is logically possible for God to have created a world with free beings that always do what is right (Beebe). This is still consistent with the idea that human beings have free choice. The atheist argues God could have created a world where humans have free will, but no evil befalls them. This world would not contain any evil because man would always choose what is good. Furthermore, God would make sure to protect man. However, I see two crucial problems with this world. I believe an illustration helps explain these problems.

Imagine there are two crystal balls in front of you, each showing what the world could be. In World #1 no evil befalls man, but he has free will. In World #2 evil befalls man, and he has free will (current state of the world). What would World #1 look like? I would imagine that man would not truly be free. The Oxford dictionary describes freedom as “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint” (Oxford Dictionary). Man would not be completely free to choose as he wants; rather he would be a *forced* slave to God who is all good. Yes, man could try to run away from God or doing something less good, but in this world man would always come back to what is right and just, because that is how he is designed. Man would then return to God, who himself and his law is right and just.

Most people in this present age would agree that slavery is wrong. Yes, a slave might find joy in his work, but there is no choice on his own. In World #1, I see man as a *forced* slave of

God. While it is good to be a slave to God, in the sense that one seeks out his perfect will in all situations, this is not truly freedom; rather man is more like a robot. The second problem I see in World #1 is the fact that man is not able to develop agape or unconditional love because things would always be at the proper condition. In World #2 it not only shows that humans develop a greater capacity to love those who are not good, but it shows the great love of God is. God loves even those who reject him and turn their backs to him. In World #2 we can work towards becoming like God and loving those who commit evil.

Imagine you had a daughter and you viewed them in World #1 and World #2. Which daughter do you have the greater love for? In World #1 your daughter would be free from mistakes and imperfections. But, in World #2 you would watch your daughter fall and make mistakes. It should not take much time for you to make your decision. The greater love is found in World #2. Clearly you love your children the way they are in World #2. You love them for their mistakes, you love watching them grow into their own person. You realize that in World #1 that is not true free will. There is no choice between good and evil. Given the current nature of the world there is true freedom and the potential for a greater love.

I recognize the logical problem of evil is a tough issue to grapple with in our human existence. In my personal life it is precisely this evil that forces me to turn to God. When I cannot bear the suffering I am forced to cry out "Father"! Only when I feel God's love in prayer or through others I am consoled. It is exactly this: knowing that you are loved by God. It is exactly this love that generates faith in a greater power and hope in a greater future. Many people do not know and have not felt loved by God. Without knowing God's love, I would not be able to adequately encounter suffering and evil in my day to day activities. Our culture has created so much noise and so many distractions to keep God out. When we experience this divine love we realize it can overcome all things. We see that in this world, God is shaping us to become people



of great love. Not to fear or run from evil, but to overcome it. We start to see that a perfect Father does not make things easy for those whom he loves. Most importantly, in all things we see the eternal picture. That suffering on this earth can be seen as a gift, as it detaches us from this life and prepares us for the next. Suffering is a wakeup call, to prepare ourselves for the glory eternity.

### **Natural Problem of Evil**

While the logical problem of evil is perhaps a flawed atheistic argument, I believe the problem of natural of evil proposes bigger problems for the theist. How could an all loving God permit innocent individuals to experience disease or illness? Why does an all loving God permit his children to be killed by devastating and horrific natural disasters? Freelance writer Stephen Beale explains this bigger problem for the theist: “Unlike the problem of moral evil, there is no moral agent whom we can blame for natural evil—no Hitler or other sadistic mass murderer” (Beale). If there is a creator, he would have designed the universe and its natural laws. God knew people were going to suffer from terrible natural tragedies. Does this make him nonexistent or less good? Let’s investigate:

The atheist and the believer would agree on one thing: the world is not as it ought to be. They might not agree by the same method or notion but both parties agree the world is out of sync. To explain why the world is out of sync, a believer would reference the fall of mankind in the bible: Genesis Chapter 3. The order of the world was altered by mankind’s poor use of freedom. The atheist would attribute solely natural forces to the chaos we face on earth. The way we experience the world cannot be reconciled with the existence and design of a good God. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga “claims it is possible that what we normally call natural evil is really

broadly moral evil caused by nonhuman free agents” (Peterson, 50-51). Most people familiar with Christianity will think of the evil as resulting from the work of Satan who is commonly called the devil and his minions called demons. It is popular in many cultures to attribute suffering, misery, trials, and temptations to the work of Satan. This defense denies the existence of natural evil. However, I would like to point out that Plantinga’s response that nonhuman free agents cause natural evil is not Catholic or Christian Doctrine, believers are not required to accept this. Plantinga’s solution seems far-fetched to the atheist. However, the argument does show how it can be reasonable for a believer to acknowledge natural evil yet still believe in God.

I would like to offer some further propositions to help answer the “why” for natural evil. For starters, natural evil is only evil because in our human moral judgment it appears evil. While natural disaster may hurt us physically, they often benefit the planet and natural ecosystems. They bring about change and help bring people together. The same goes with disease and illness. A child suffering from cancer may bring others together, people back to the faith, or bring a realization to individuals that they should be more grateful for the things of everyday life. Also, one must take into consideration that death may appear negative, but if it leads to eternal life, this brings about a much greater good for the individual dying. To this suggestion that natural evil is not truly evil the atheist may respond: “But could not God create a world in which his children are protected from natural disasters and life threatening illnesses?” Certainly it would seem feasible for an omnipotent being to create a world in which the ecosystem supported itself without the expense of human life. The believer could respond by using a greater good or soul-making theodicy. Without evil, certain virtues like forgiveness, patience, and courage could not exist. We become people of great love because of the evils we are forced to overcome. We as humans could very well fail to see the greater purpose.

In summary, while natural evil poses a bigger problem than the logical problem of evil, I believe there are still many possible answers the theist can offer. Throughout our lifetime many of

us see the compassion and love that natural evil spurs. For example, look at the volunteers that traveled to Haiti to help rebuild homes and infrastructure after they were devastated by a hurricane. Another example close to home would be the thousands of college students who participate in THON to help defeat pediatric cancer. These are all examples of the greater love that fosters from the existence of natural evil.

### **The Problem of Gratuitous Evil**

The most powerful atheistic argument against the existence of God is the existence of gratuitous evil. Gratuitous evils are “pointless evils from which no greater good appears to result” (Beebe). William Rowe gives as a famous concrete example in William Wainwright’s book the *Philosophy of Religion*:

Example 1: A fawn is trapped in a forest fire and dies a lingering and painful death.

Example 2: A child is brutally raped and murdered by her mother’s boyfriend

Rowe argues the following:

1. No goods we know of justify God’s permission of example 1 and example 2
2. The probability is fairly high that we would know the goods which would justify God in permitting example 1 and example 2 if God existed.
3. It is probable that God does not exist

(Wainwright, 97)

Rowe believes this argument to be evidence in support of the non-existence of God or at the least a God who is not God-like. However, to the theist’s defense, it seems plausible that human beings have limited knowledge as to whether or not a greater good occurs. An example that might be helpful is the following: a ten year old boy falls off a rollercoaster and dies. However, after the accident the international association of amusement parks makes rollercoaster safety requirements

much tighter, saving a couple hundred lives in the future. Furthermore, perhaps the boy was very religious at a young age and his life's witness encourages others to go back to church. Maybe some of the kids at school start a volunteer project in honor of him. The point the theist would make here is that God uses all things for the greater good, even seemingly pointless evils to the finite mind.

Rowe would counter back with the following argument: "There is no reason to think that the greater goods in virtue of which God permits most sufferings come into existence in the distant future or that once they do come into existence, we remain ignorant of them and their relation to the sufferings" (Peterson, 79). If God loves his children he will show them why he permitted evil to befall them. Presently, this is the most popular objection to the existence of God.

But is it wrong for God to wait to show us the meaning of various sufferings until we are with him? Why would a loving Father wait to show his kids something so important? Probably the same reason we wait to tell people important things that are close to our hearts. We wait for the right moment, we wait until we completely trust them, and they are ready. We surprise them and it brings them much joy! A perfectly loving Father does not always give his children what they want, when they want it. He denies them at times their desires, so they learn patience, which is ultimately one of the biggest aspects of love. This delayed gratitude builds discipline and character. Thus, helping us advance in virtue.

Besides the limitation of our finite minds there are some other good explanations as to why pointless evils are not a good enough reason to not believe in God. Saint Paul says in his letter to the Romans: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us" (*New American Bible*, Rom. 8:18). In other words, we have no knowledge of what awaits us after death. Sufferings, trials, and tribulations in this life, may hold merit in the next life. While Rowe's argument is strong it is not conclusive that "seemingly" pointless evils are a conclusive reason to refuse to believe in God's existence.

However, there is more to cover regarding gratuitous evil because it poses a potential spiritual problem for the believer. We find this problem in the classic novel by Dostoevsky *The Brothers Karamazov* when Ivan asks his brother Alyosha, who is a Russian orthodox monk, why God permits evil to befall young children:

"Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its centre, I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. I am a bug, and I recognize in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is...But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That's a question I can't answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I've only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among men. I understand solidarity in retribution, too; but there can be no such solidarity with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers' crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension." (Dostoevsky)

This dimension of the problem of evil deals with the actual experience of evil. Sometimes this is referred to by philosophers as the existential problem of evil. As Ivan explains above, he cannot rationalize why a good God would permit certain evils. The question that sticks out from the passage above is the following: how can one possibly believe in God while experiencing such horrific evil? When you are experiencing evil in your heart are you really thinking: "surely there

is a greater good here!”? For example, the atheist argues one does not look at the recent Sandy Hook school shootings and say: “God will surely bring a greater good out of this, no worries!” Is God really Omni-present? Because given evil, if he does it exist, it seems that he is distant and far out, something like a deists idea of a creator. So given the horrendous experience of evil, either God is a terrible father or does not exist. It’s this experience of evil that leads the atheist to sheer disbelief in a theistic God.

I believe the only solution to this experience of evil is a relationship with God, that supreme good, which makes all other evils bearable. Based on a somewhat personal experience, I believe when one experiences evil the only solution is a personal relationship with God. In a response to complete free will, the master himself hopes intense suffering will lead his children to seek him out. I believe God gives us this answer very clearly in the bible. When Job experiences great suffering he seeks out the Lord: “Oh that today I might him” (*New American Bible*, Job 23:3). Then after seeking him, the Lord reveals himself to Job. After Job encounters the Lord his life and perspective is completely transformed. Job’s complaining ceases. Job says: “I know you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be hindered. I have dealt with great things that I do not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know. I heard of you by word of mouth but no my eye has seen you. Therefore, I disown what I have said and repent in dust and ashes.” (*New American Bible*, Job 42:2-6).

This encounter with the deity changes everything for the individual suffering. A parent would be able to relate to this. The reason parents ground their children are to not only teach them a lesson, but to help them come to the realization: “You know Dad/Mom, you’re right.” This is the same realization that happens when one comes to know God the Father. God you’re right I need to worry less about money, stop having sex outside of my marriage, drinking excessively and the later. You are right God I tend to look at everything in a negative sense! I understand God you really do bring a greater good out of suffering! I will spend more time on explaining this

special intimacy between suffering and a personal relationship with God throughout the rest of my thesis.

In conclusion, while gratuitous evil poses the biggest problem to the believer I still do not believe its argument defeats the existence of God. First, because of human beings finite knowledge, they cannot deduce with certainty, that an occurrence or event of evil was truly pointless. Second, because we do not know what rewards await us in the afterlife for our sufferings here on earth, we cannot deduce that evil is pointless. Third, for one to maintain faith in God after experiencing horrendous and pointless evils, the believer can claim God's desire is for their suffering to lead them to a personal relationship with him, which is the greatest God.

## **Conclusion**

The philosophical argument against the existence of God using the problem of evil is certainly a strong argument. However, it is not a conclusive reason to refuse to believe in God's existence. This is primarily because moral evil occurs because of God's ultimate loving gift of free will and our ability to share in shaping the planet, God's permission of evil offers countless benefits to not only our earthly betterment but of our own salvation, and in our limited finite minds there is no possible way we could deduce with certainty that an evil was truly pointless. In addition, in response to existential problem of evil the argument that an intimate relationship with the greatest good: God himself, seems to provide evidence that within the constraints of free will, God permits suffering with the intent of leading his children back to him. While I might be able to defend against all the atheist claims about evil, I still do not find all the philosophical arguments for the existence of God to be satisfying. I am afraid these free will and greater good theodicies make God appear to be a distant father. As a Christian I personally believe God is Omni-present in your own life. How does the Christian account for divine intervention and

miracles? How come sometimes prayer stops war and at other times it doesn't? I personally only find the following solution to evil acceptable: given our total free will, God uses evil to bring about a greater good, more specifically the greatest good: a personal relationship with him. Now, throughout the rest of my paper I will tell you more about this relationship with God and my personal experience.



## Chapter 2

### My Story: Unconditional Joy

#### Exemplary Parents

“I’m Scared Bill!” These were the first words my mother, now Jennifer Galdo, said to my father, William Galdo, after finding out she was pregnant. After talking with my father, my mother took a trip to the on campus bookstore at Lycoming College and bought a little boy’s size sweatshirt. Reality started to kick in and my mom was faced with a decision. Before her thanksgiving break she called her parents (my grandparents): “Mom, I need you and Dad to make sure you have enough room in the car for all of my stuff, because I’m not going back to school.” My grandma kindly responded: “Okay honey.” Grandma was just trying to keep her cool.

They spent the car ride home in complete silence for three hours. My grandparents had only met my father one time previously, and had no idea what to think of the whole situation. My mom was only a freshman! My grandmother worked at one of the local Catholic churches in town. What would the people think? My mom remembers sitting at the Christmas midnight mass clenching my father’s hand and whispering in his ear: “Our lives are going to change forever.” They both were poor and if it was not for my grandparent’s charity things probably would have ended up differently. My mom at the time had a couple thousand in savings. She could have had an abortion, but as she says to this day: “the thought never crossed my mind.”

July 17, 1992 it all began for me: A child was born to a couple that was too young, had too little income, and was not married. The odds were against them, but they were determined to beat it. They were frightened, but excited to begin raising their first son: Stephen Christopher Galdo. It was during those first years that my parents were forced to make heroic sacrifices.

Along the way my mom gave birth to my younger brother, Brendan, and my sister, Julia. After my brother's birth my mom developed Crohn's disease, an inflammatory disorder in which the immune system attacks the gastrointestinal tract (America). My mother describes this time as one of the "lowest points in her life." Often times my mother had to rely on my father to take care of my other two siblings and me. She would wake up in the middle of the night in pain or have to run to the bathroom. Times were tough. At 4 years old I would have to help take care of my brother. My parents were struggling to make ends meet. My mom remembers reflecting during this time on a story called "Footprints in the sand":

*One night I had a dream...*

I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord, and Across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; One belonged to me, and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before us, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that many times along the path of my life, There was only one set of footprints.

I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life This really bothered me, and I questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, You would walk with me all the way; But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, There is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why in times when I needed you the most, you should leave me.

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child. I love you, and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you. (Powers)

My mom always found power in the last sentence: "When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you" (Powers). Instead of complaining, my parents bore their struggles patiently and counted their sufferings as blessings. My mom would always say: "God will never give you more than you can handle." In fact, they both have shared with me how their hardships helped them grow in their marriage. Through love, my parents were able to conquer all the trials they faced.

As I reflect, I understand that inevitably my parents were going to have to face hardships because of their decision to raise a child that early on in their lives. However, why was it fair that my Mom had to endure a series of health issues; more specifically Crohn's disease during this period. Why did Jesus Christ, the divine healer not intervene? Perhaps he did, but waited until all of her children were grown up. It's exactly this "why" question we encounter with evil that leads us to search for a higher power. What's critical is the human response to suffering. My parents responded with faith that saw this as an opportunity to love, to turn to God. Prophetically, I believe through my encounter with suffering, I developed the same resolution.

This is why I think it is so fitting that God (through my parents) chose my name to be Stephen after the great Saint and martyr. Saint Stephen was the first Christian to be killed for following Christ. Through the example of the martyr's we see evil is overcome by love. When we see the martyrs of the church we do not say: "How terrible that they died that way." But rather, "how great is their love, their sacrifice!" We become more focused on their courageous witness, then the evil at hand. Light and darkness cannot co-exist in the same space. When we embrace suffering with faith in God, we do not allow fear to conquer us.

### **Interior Reflections: Growing Up**

My sufferings in life have been far and few between. I have had it pretty easy and I owe much of that to my family, who always seemed to make sacrifices and shelter me from harm's way. I had a so-called "normal childhood", attending public school, making some friends, falling in love with video games, and being forced to play football, which I eventually fell in love with. My parents took me to church every Sunday as a kid. Looking back the only thing I'm more thankful for, besides my parents bringing me into this world, is being baptized in the Catholic Church. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, through Baptism I was "reborn as a son of God" (Catechism). I thoroughly believe these graces<sup>1</sup>I received allowed me to never doubt God's existence and perhaps think about him more than those who were not brought up in a particular faith. As a kid I always liked church. My favorite part was shaking people's hands. However, as I got older church began to change. It became something I would always secretly

---

hope my family would skip, and I started to go to CCD<sup>2</sup> with the intention of finding a new girlfriend. Religion just seemed like a check sheet of chores.

As a young teen I began to see that I thought about God more than others. I was more willing to investigate and question things, whereas my peers just stared off into space. Whenever I attempted to initiate a conversation about my faith, someone would usually shoot it down. I say this not to hint that I was pre-destined to fall in love with Jesus, but to convey that often humans are their own worst enemies. Too many times, those who practice the faith keep others away. Religion becomes an extracurricular activity, not a way of life. God is seen as a distant Father, not a source of life. We teach people about Jesus, but we do not create an environment conducive to developing a relationship with him. We become like scientists calculating how many licks it takes to get to the sense of the tootsie pop, instead of enjoying life for what it is. Faith becomes something we always need hard data to prove. What a miserable outlook to give life! We still cannot cure cancer, feed the hungry, and fix the economy, so maybe we should stop trying to be God, and rather perfect the virtue of humility and tell the children: "I'm sorry son, I do not have all the answers, but with a little faith, and a positive outlook you can certainly get somewhere in this world."

Even myths are ridiculed, despite all the merit and lessons we can learn from the stories. Sometimes people of faith love the law more than their neighbor, think they know better than others, and love themselves, not God. I struggled to find peers who were models of the faith. I never saw people smile at church or share the joy of the gospel message with me. I rarely heard Jesus' name invoked to give thanks or someone simply say the words: "Jesus I love you." Rather, I heard peers say: "Jesus!" when they were frustrated.

---

I remember in particular this one time I was at mass with a family and my parents ran into a friend. “HI, Jen & Bill are these your kids? Wow they look just like you! Yes, we always come to this mass because afterwards we have the whole day to ourselves.”

It was right then that some sort of divine wisdom hit me. Hold on one second there, you are telling me that you were just worshipping the God who you believe to be the King of the universe and you work him around your day? Even as a kid, I could sense something was amiss. My point here is often our world provides a barrier to Jesus and authentic people of faith are far and few between. At least atheists take time to think: “is God real?” than just going through the motions like some of my fellow Christian (in name only) brothers and sisters.

In junior high and early high school I was caught up in appearance and social relationships. I put faith on the back burner for friends. My desire was to be accepted among my peers and to have people tell me: “Galdo, you’re cool!” I did not want to be the kid who had to sit at lunch alone. I tried to live by good morals, to present a good image in front of others. However, I often did immoral things in secret when people were not watching. I forgot that God was watching, or maybe I did not care. Like the average teenage boy, I got caught up with lust. As I reflect on this time period in my life, I come to see that we never sin intentionally; we seek what will make us happy. I was taking something good, my sexual desire and using it for some temporary pleasure that was hurting me. As C.S. Lewis says about masturbation: “it sends the man back into the prison of himself.” (Fradd) Here’s an excerpt from one of Lewis’s letters on masturbation:

For me the real evil of masturbation would be that it takes an appetite which, in lawful use, leads the individual out of himself to complete (and correct) his own personality in that of another (and finally in children and even grandchildren) and turns it back; sends the man back into the prison of himself, there to keep a harem of imaginary brides. And

this harem, once admitted, works against his ever getting out and really uniting with a real woman.

For the harem is always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions which no woman can rival. Among those shadowy brides he is always adored, always the perfect lover; no demand is made on his unselfishness, no mortification ever imposed on his vanity. In the end, they become merely the medium through which he increasingly adores himself...After all; almost the main work of life is to come out of our selves, out of the little dark prison we are all born in. Masturbation is to be avoided as all things are to be avoided which retard this process. The danger is that of coming to love the prison.

*- Personal Letter From Lewis to Keith Masson (found in The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume 3) (Fradd)*

I did not feel guilty about what I was doing because of the falsely applied: “You’re going to hell” doctrine. I felt guilty because I was addicted, it was against my human nature, and it was selfish. This experiment sexuality manifested itself into pornography and eventual experimentation with a girlfriend. All this time, I hated myself each time I committed the act. I knew I was hurting myself, others, and God. I was addicted and there did not seem to be answer. The guys at school and the media just made it seem like “sexual experimentation” was normal. But something was not right and I did not want to spend the rest of my life chasing something that the pleasure only lasted for a matter of minutes. There is no such thing as an addiction that only affects the individual. Many addictions destroy virtue, especially charity. With things like masturbation, pornography, etc. it causes one to focus on sexual acts, to imagine one’s self with another individual. This makes it difficult for one to resist temptation, but even worse focus on one’s own selfish desires. If the addiction manifests enough (which it almost always does) it causes the individual to focus on sexual desires when present with someone else of the same sex. This in

essence creates selfishness, and sets up a barrier to love. When the individual has sex he will become more focused on the physical aspect of sex, rather than person (Team, 2013). Perhaps addictions such as masturbation are one of many catalysts for our short-fuse pleasure seeking culture. It's one of those things no one likes to talk about. Through this struggle I came to see that I was searching for a joy that was complete. Instead, I felt myself feeling like an animal, in constant search of short-fused pleasure. Like a dog, my master kept throwing a stick and I kept fetching. I was being tricked by the "Father of Lies" (*New American Bible*, Jn. 4:48).

### **Finding a purpose: High school track**

"You can do it son", he told me. "You have to believe in yourself, it's more mental than physical." These words from my Dad I put into practice the next time I stepped on the track. "Hey Steve, I am not feeling too well today. I think you're going to have to carry us on this one." Brian Wilson, the fastest 800 meter runner at Plum Junior High school, had just approached me and encouraged me to "carry the team." The feeling of nervousness and anxiety seemed to spread increasingly though out my body. I had not even come close to Brian in prior races. That being said, after reading a book on track and field and talking to my Dad I told the demons of doubt to go away, and used the "demon slayer" technique. I recollected on all those great, high-pressure filled moments during football, where I stepped up to the occasion. Despite, this being a different sport, I had a feeling this would be a defining moment in my track season. "Good luck" Brian said and we shook hands. We stepped onto the track, surrounded by about 40 other nervous and skinny junior high jocks. The official held up the gun, shot it, and we were off! I started rather slowly and was caught off guard, but adrenaline kicked in and I placed myself in the middle of the pack around the first bend of the track. I fixed my eyes upon the back of Brian's jersey; he was about 5 spots ahead of me. If I could only beat him!

Knowing that I was typically a speedster on the second lap, I held tight, waiting patiently. Once the second lap hit I started pacing myself, passing opponents one by one. I was so surprised that I was keeping up with the front runners at my first track invitational<sup>3</sup>. During the second lap, on the straightway, I passed Brian and just kept going. Why was everyone slowing down? I felt like I had so much energy! As soon as we faced the last 100 meters I went into high gear and flagged as many skinny wimps as I could. After I crossed the finish line, I looked up and smiled at my Dad. I followed his advice and it paid off! I placed 7th in the event and got to stand on a podium! Wow, I was one of the fastest 800 meter runners in Western, PA! My teammates were coming up to me congratulating me that I had beat Brian. I remember some kid saying “He’s been the top dog for all these years; I’d never seen anyone on our own team beat him.” I soon found that my luck was not just because Brian had a bad day. The rest of the track season we would duke it out for the top runner spot. For the first time in my life, I believed in myself.

In high school things started to change and I found my significance in running. I became the fastest 800 meter runner on the team as a freshman. I had a breakout year: I was setting records, making the paper, and gaining popularity in school. My coach was determined that I would be running at states within the year. “Super Steve” they called me and I sure loved the name. So, I gave up football and went out for the cross country team. As usual, I pushed myself to new levels and became the fastest runner on the team. That was until; I developed tendonitis in my calf muscles. Yes, perhaps the most unusual injury to befall a distance runner, and it happened to me. Quite frankly, I had the leg muscles of a sprinter, but was running long distance. This injury put me out for the season and even when I tried to come back and run, my legs would start burning. My significance was taken away and I felt empty. What was to come was even worse; little did I know that the next years of my high school career would be plagued with

---



hamstring injuries, asthma, and other problems. I was never the same runner that I was “made to be” or so I thought.

“I do not understand mom, it’s just not fair, why does this always happen to me?” We were just leaving the pharmacy after picking up more medicine. “Stephen, I cannot explain, but maybe you should take better care of yourself. Maybe God wants you to focus on something else.” These next few words I said I will never forget: “Mom, I’m angry with God!”

During my running success I would try to turn away from various sins, go to church, and pray before races for good karma. I did not believe in Karma, but that was how my relationship with God was back then. “God please let me succeed.” As I reflect I realize that I clearly misunderstood God back then. I failed to take responsibility for my own actions, and blamed God for my mishaps. I was the one who was training too hard, which led to my injury, I was hurting myself. This same notion can be applied to sin as I mention earlier. Yes, we most certainly hurt God when we sin, but we also hurt ourselves and those around us. As Karl Keating mentions in his book: *What Catholics Really Believe*: “Just as there is no victimless crimes, there are no sins, which affect only the sinner.” (Keating 65) When we sin, we influence others. Since our sins cause evil, “a deprivation of good” (Koukl), then there is no mistake that there must be lots of evil in the world because we are all great sinners.

Back then, I used to view God more as a God of justice than of love. I saw God as the source of all punishment, of all evil. I believed my injuries were punishment for my sins. While it’s true that evil can be the result of sin, there is also instances in which evil befalls a just, innocent person. We see this within the old testament of the bible within the book of Job. Job is “a blameless and upright man who feared God and avoided evil” (*New American Bible, Job 1:1*). One day Satan arrives with the other angels before God. After some conversation God points out the righteousness of his servant Job. Satan mocks God saying: “Is it for nothing that Job is God-fearing?” (*New American Bible, Job 1:9*). Then God allows Satan to test Job; so Job experiences

all sorts of evil losing his possessions, his sons and daughters, and becomes sick himself. After hearing about his suffering, three of Job's friends arrive to help him. All of them try to tell Job that he has been suffering, because he has sinned. However, Job knows he has done nothing wrong. When God responds at the end of the book, we learn Job was right and there's no exact answer to "why" question of his suffering. Rather the suffering is seen as a form of a test. This suffering draws Job closer to God and through Job's love of God, he overcomes the evil. I was like Job's friends trying to justify and explain the reasons for my seeming punishment.

Instead of losing hope and giving up, I started to realize that there was a reason for all of this. Like a man who loses his job, I started to search for something better. So, I began actually applying myself in school. I grew up a little and started becoming more realistic about my future. What do I want to do with my life? At this time, I acquired my first job and learned a little bit about responsibility. So, following the example of my parents I adopted the mindset, all things work out for the good.

### **The Turning Point**

Upon graduation of high school I attended a Penn State satellite school in Erie, Pennsylvania called Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. I originally was very upset that I was not able to attend University Park campus. Once again, I questioned the hand I was dealt. It very much hurt my ego, to see my friends being accepted at the main campus, while I felt not good enough. However, after sometime I realized through faith there was a reason I came here. I started to stand out as a freshman, as a leader on campus. I made lots of friends, got a 4.0, was hired as a resident assistant, promoted as a supervisor, entered the honors program, received a scholarship, landed a summer job, and much more. I achieved all my goals as a freshman and felt for the first time in my life that everything was right. Once again like the "Super Steve" persona I

carried with me through high school I was seen at Behrend as “world savior”. Despite, the popularity and acceptance, there was something I learned from my past that I applied to my personal decisions in college: the best way to not get addicted is to never start. So, I went against the grain and avoided underage binge drinking my freshman year. In the beginning, I would go to parties, but I would always refuse alcohol. I had messed up a lot of things in the past from giving into peer pressure; I did not want to make the same mistake again. I saw peers respecting my choice, admiring it, and many confessing they did not have the strength to do the same. It was at this point I saw the value of a properly formed conscience. Many people were doing something they thought would be good, but in the end the pain was greater than the gain: social skills dependent upon alcohol, countless nights throwing up on the toilet, and regrettable decisions they would always live with. It was during this time that I really questioned my morals and beliefs. Why was I denying myself something my peers sought? I believe my choice to not drink led to my search for a relationship with God. I gained the confidence to go against the grain, to seek what so many walked past. I realized that just because so many people are going in one direction, does not make it necessarily right.

That summer after my freshman year everything changed. I came to a realization that I had accomplished all my goals, but still felt so empty. I was a workhorse, constantly working hard, but for what reason? To marry a nice girl someday? To get a high paying job? To be able to drive a fast car, it just all felt so superficial and empty. I remember posting on Facebook: “The dream you thought that would never come true, now it’s here and you do not know what to do.” I had no reason to be discontent, so I did not share with anyone what was on my heart. In addition that summer, I suffered a hip injury and my acne started to worsen. All these feelings of confusion were bottling up inside. I was developing depression, but I felt as if no one could understand. This was the paradox: on the outside everything appeared to be in order, but internally I was bleeding. I just kept feeling sorry for myself and exaggerated the “horrible”

circumstances of my life. I hid my shame and pondered if it would really matter if I just crashed the car, if I just died. Would anyone care? I heard peers say “I live life with no regrets”, but a lot of what I saw in my past was not the best. These things I centered my life around were not necessarily bad, but they were not providing a true sense of worth. So many people live their life based upon conditional happiness. Everything has to be in place, and if anything happens that’s not according to plan they’re down and out. I started to realize that I was that conditionally happy person I despised. I was that person filled with a never ending anxiety. However, for what? What was I so anxious to do? Because the more and more I kept getting recognition and rewards, the less and less I was grateful for having received them.

I somehow managed to get through that summer, but it forced me to really question the meaning of life. Also, feeling empty forced me to get on my knees and pray. Something I had never done seriously, except for selfish motives; for my own glory. I like how C.S. Lewis addressed that God brings good out of pain, in his book *The Problem of Pain and Suffering*, when Lewis says: “Prosperity and living happily ever after are not the only answers to this life. God troubles us giving us warnings that there is something more important we will have to answer for someday” (Lewis, 97).

Instead of constantly seeing this dark time as punishment from a divine source, I eventually came to see that my priorities were off balance. I came to see how caught up I was in my own-self misery. Poor me, poor me! As I reflect I realize how quick we are as humans to exaggerate our trials and tribulations. We often exaggerate personal sufferings. Like, the nightly news channel we spend more of our time swimming in our own self-pity and negativity. So, as I arrived back at school for my sophomore year I came in with two goals: to give more of my time by volunteering and to actually start paying attention at church. I was on a journey searching for something better! As I got more involved with community service I started to see the truth to the maxim “in giving you receive.” There was something that the poor had, that I did not. Hope for

the future, joy that was in simple things, and a divine gratitude that seemed to penetrate the hearts of everyone around them. Everything to them appeared to come from the hands of God, because basic necessities in their own personal lives were lacking. Furthermore, I watched my own personal misery disappear as I got caught up in the joy of serving others. I always found it ironic that they were supposedly “less fortunate” yet each time I left the place I was volunteering at I felt that I was the one who was “less fortunate.” I started to realize that my problems really weren’t so bad and for the first time I felt that I was part of something bigger than myself.

“Do you and Nicole want to go visit the families?” My site leader Ian McGinnity asked. “Of course! I am sure it’ll be a blast”, I said. Nicole smiled and we followed an employee from the low-income day care center out to the van. I was on a spring break service trip in Mission, Texas; kind of an ironic name. Besides battling poverty, Mission Texas had been hurt by a hurricane the prior year. We were helping re-build a family’s home. However, this day I went with a group of people to a local low-income day care center. Nicole and I now were joining an employee on her rounds to the poor mothers who had children. As we pulled up to the house I remember being filled with a sense of peace. Having the ability to do good, to help others; what a gift from God!

“Ola!” We all happily screamed as we walked into the home. I immediately noticed the small size of the living space. The employee thankfully could translate and introduced us. Nicole and I got the good job, because we got to play with her older children while the employee did the talking with the mother. The joy of the children infected us. They were just so happy to have someone to play with. To have someone that would pay attention to them! As we were playing I noticed a beautiful crucifix the family had on the wall. I marveled at its beauty, how it was the center piece of the home. What a paradox! This family who had little to nothing was more faithful than me. Jesus Christ was certainly at the center of their lives. Despite their struggles they did not get caught up in the trap of self-misery. There was no “why me!” from the mother, only smiles,

only joy. How long it had taken me to see! This love the family had could overcome any evil, any roadblock in their way. Love, was the answer! In my life I have continuously found God revealing to me the poor as an example of how to handle suffering. After the employee from the daycare was done talking I asked her to translate something to the mother for me. "Your crucifix is beautiful!" After I said these words, the mother's reaction surprised me. She smiled, glanced at me for a few moments and took the crucifix down of the wall. She said: "I want you to have this." I was going to refuse, but then was told by the employee that refusing would be rude, I gladly carried the cross back to the mission site!

"Steve where did you get that cross?" My friend Clifton had a huge grin on his face. I met Clifton earlier on the trip and had learned he was very passionate about his faith. "You realize, this is a sign from God right, Steve?" "I guess", I chuckled.

As my friend Adam says "How many coincidences does it take until we come to the conclusion God is real?" Two weeks after this sign from the Lord I found myself on a faith retreat in Erie, Pennsylvania called Divine Mercy Encounter. It was on this retreat that I had what one would call "a personal encounter" with Jesus Christ (God). I had this encounter many times before, especially in the poor I had served, but was not able to recognize God was the source. Throughout the retreat numerous people shared stories similar to mine: of emptiness, or brokenness, or a desire to be healed. However, they contributed their source of healing to a personal, living God who was with them each step of the way. He had already paid the price on the cross and we were invited to unite our little sufferings with his. Their joy seemed supernatural and radiated from their kindness and wisdom. Throughout the weekend countless people served us food, prayed for us, took an interest in us, and gave us all sorts of gifts. Never in my life, had I met people who loved strangers, so genuinely. These volunteers had no idea who I was, but they told me their job was to "Love." It was during a Roman Catholic Practice called: "Eucharistic

Adoration”<sup>4</sup> that I had the first strong (and recognized) “encounter” with Jesus Christ. It was this moment as I was surrounded by hundreds of others singing praise that I realized this was the joy, the peace, which I had been longing for; this was the desire on my heart. I felt at this moment God speak the words to me: “Surrender.” So, at this moment I surrendered all my fears of losing control, I stopped dwelling on my past regrets, and vowed to become the man my heavenly father created me to be. For the first time in my life, I realized and felt the infinite love of God.

It was after these events during my sophomore year, that my faith truly became the center of my life. Like a good sergeant who provides for his squad; God does not leave us without ammunition. God gives us a weapon that can defeat evil: Love. During this retreat I realized everyone’s calling was to love. This is what each human being was created to do. I learned that this joy I was experiencing on the retreat was “the real world.” That that world I spent 19 years of my life in was dark. Through God’s mercy and love I was reunited to him in a real sense. I had developed deep relationships with fellow Catholics who would continue to help form my spiritual life throughout the year. It was at this point that I was able to make sense of the trials and suffering along the way. If I had never hit such a low-point, I would never have turned to God in such a radical way. I would have never sought the ultimate good: God himself. Joy comes out of pain with Jesus.

Even through my small suffering as a teenager and young adult, God lead me to question the seemingly serene stability around me. My own comfort or pride did not provide unconditional happiness or joy. My heart was like a bucket and I kept filling it with things that dried up. The only way I was able to fill my heart was by filling it with God. God is eternal, everlasting, and all good. The peace that God provides allows for the perfect joy; the joy that is not conditionally based upon reducing suffering or shaping the environment around us. God wants to be so united

---

in love with us, that no outside circumstances conditionally alter the relationship. Suffering causes man to question why? Suffering causes man to interiorly search for the answer: Is there a God? Is there something beyond this life? God is not the source of suffering; rather God is the answer to suffering: Love.

Evil in this world is rampant and it is certainly everywhere. Even those who do not believe or read the bible would certainly agree the world has a fallen nature. Things are not the way they ought to be. Unfortunately, evil in this present age has caused people to mistrust or not believe in God. In the first section we came to the conclusion that through God's gift of free will evil exists. However, I think this philosophical free will theodicy often paints God as a distant figure and misses the weapon God gives us to fight evil. This weapon is love for another. When we come to know Jesus, we experience this unconditional love and joy. Once we receive, we have a desire to share and give this same love to one another. As Jesus says to the disciples: "I have come to set the earth on fire and how I wish it were already blazing" (*New American, Lk. 12:49*), so we too must bring the good news. With this love from God, we can change the world!



## **Chapter 3**

### **The Call to Suffering**

#### **Redemptive Suffering**

I was woken up abruptly and felt the weakness in my body. I must have only slept three hours! What kind of faith retreat was this? Then I realized that it was my own personal decision to stay up late talking to some of my peers. As I continued to wake up, I heard my friend Chris lament behind me: “Why do we have to get up so early? Ugh!” My friend Brian retorted “Offer it up.” Everyone seemed to be in such a hurry, so I grabbed my towel and headed off to the shower. I started the shower and found out quickly the “hot water” was out of order. I started to reflect on what Brian said: “Offer it up.” I had the notion that I would do this while the cold water was coming in contact with my skin, but I was not sure what it exactly meant. Was it some form of prayer, or an old adage? Later that day I stopped and asked Brian what “offering it up” meant. Brian then told me:

“You can give your pain and discomfort to Jesus (God). He will use it for someone. You can pray for the living, deceased, etc. Jesus suffered much in his life and gave it all to God, the Father, to pray for others. We too can do the same.”

Little did I know that what Brian just told me would change my outlook on suffering forever!

Perhaps more concrete are the weapons of prayer Jesus left us with: the Eucharist<sup>5</sup>, his mother Mary<sup>6</sup>, but the one I would like to focus on is the way *Jesus gave meaning to suffering*. In the Catholic Church we call the theology behind this mystery: *redemptive suffering*. Former Pope John II defines redemptive suffering in the following way: "In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his sufferings, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ" (Paul II). In simpler terms Christians believe Jesus' death on the cross enabled us to receive salvation from God. This was a perfect act of love, an example for us to follow. But, it was even more than that, because we can unite our sufferings with him for the greater benefit of mankind and ourselves. Since Jesus suffered for us, we too can share in this redemption and suffer for others. Jesus on the cross gives meaning to suffering!

Saint Paul leaves us numerous references in scripture: "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worships (*New American Bible*, Rom. 12:1)." In the Old Testament believers often offered animals, food, material objects, and various other things as sacrifices to God. Saint Paul here asks us to offer our life as a sacrifice to God. You can entrust those daily decisions, obstacles, and tribulations God for the greater good of humanity. In his letter to the Colossians Saint Paul further expounds on the idea that we can share in the redemption of humanity with Christ: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body." Paul is not saying that Christ's sacrifice on the

---

cross was not fulfilling, but rather we the “body”, the church, are invited to unite our sufferings with Christ’s for the salvation of souls.

For me, redemptive suffering is the idea that any bad moment in life can be transferred into a moment of greater meaning. “Offering up” pain as a prayer for an individual, group, or cause is more motivating than the stoic nature of taking on pain for the sake of growing in virtue. While suffering does build virtues like patience, courage, and humility, taking on suffering for the sake of building *yourself* up is not as appealing to the Christian who desires “to lay down one’s life for his friends” (*New American Bible*, Jn. 15:13). What better way than to believe through the eyes of faith, that your pain will be used for the greater good of the world. This mindset allows the individual to embrace suffering rather than run away from it. The Christian relates to Christ when he/she suffers and knows that God the Father will use his or her pain to bring about greater good and salvation to other people. If this is true, how much suffering is wasted by those who do not believe or pray? Especially involuntary, but also voluntary suffering is a way to love someone through your actions. Small sacrifices each day help you become less selfish and more loving. As Pope John Paul II says: “Nothing else requires as much as does suffering (Paul II).” When one can encounter suffering and find meaning within it, a new door in life is opened.

In my life suffering has brought me closer to Christ. As I shared previously in my conversion story, if it was not for my mild depression, I would not have sought out a personal relationship with God. It should be no surprise that often those that experience horrible suffering know Christ, because Jesus talks about the necessity of suffering in the gospel of Mark: “Deny yourself, pickup your cross, and follow me” (*New American Bible*, Mk. 8:34). We come to see through the scriptures and in our own personal life that God is always with the poor, the diseased, the elderly; the forgotten. Suffering often serves as a reminder that there’s something greater than our own circumstances at hand. Our response to suffering can either be one of either faith or fear.

### **My call to suffering**

Father Rich stood up and asked: “Does anyone have something they would like to share from the weekend,? Did Jesus speak to you? Did you see Jesus this weekend? Was there someone here who has had a big impact on you this weekend?”

I was working my first divine mercy encounter retreat. My job was simply to lead those making the retreat into a deeper relationship with God. It was amazing how many of the kids started to stand up and share how the weekend had impacted them. Many expressed how they had come on this weekend expecting to be “bored” but had their life changed. After those making the retreat had shared, Father Rich motioned for those working the retreat to share. Immediately my friend Nate stood up and shared:

“I’ve had this on my heart for some time, but I think God might be calling me to check out the seminary and think about the priesthood.”

Wow! That was so gutsy! Nate had just confessed something that often I witnessed peers shy away from or not express openly. He was only a senior in high school! Not only that, but he had done it in front of some of his best friends (who he recruited to make the retreat) and his girlfriend. Instantly, I scanned around the room and looked at some of my good friends: Michael, Elisha, Alex, Kyle, Gillian, Brian, Christina, and company. Elisha was sitting right next to me and for quite some time, I, like almost half of the other guys at college, had some strong feelings for her. I felt God tug on my heart. At this moment I knew he was calling me to be a witness, to make a profound choice. Thanks be to God I did not flinch, I, then inspired by Nate, stood up and confessed: “I think God might be calling me to the priesthood too.” Awe and shock spread throughout the room, and once again everyone roared in applause. Michael was smiling and Elisha was tearing up with joy. Then even Brian, and a couple others, stood up and confessed the same desire! God was really doing something!

The next day when I journeyed back to campus I decided to attend our on campus mass. Things appeared to be normal as usual, until I noticed some guys in weird outfits with long beards. Father Miller, our campus chaplain introduced me to one of these strange men: “Hey Steve! This is brother Seraphim; he’s a brother with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal located in New York City. I was instantly taken aback by the Brother’s joy to meet me. “Was this guy a monk”? I was confused as to what this “friars” calling was.

During the “homily” (equivalent to a sermon in a protestant church) one of the other Franciscan brothers, Victorio, shared his calling. Victorio expressed a radical transformation while being happily engaged. God and even his fiancé encouraged him to at least spend some time with the friars. I was impressed by the man’s courage. Brother Seraphim shared his story with us as well. Brother Seraphim had a friend who got caught up in dark magic. After brother seraphim experienced some “dark” and “evil” things, he fled to a nearby church in fear. As brother Seraphim entered the church he was instantly hit by the spirit and fell to his knees. After sometime, brother Seraphim felt a call to give his life radically to God!

I was impressed by the friar’s total service to the poor, the church, and how they lived out radical poverty. After mass my friend Alex told me that “he could see me becoming one.” I decided someday I should visit them in New York City! From a young age, I always had a fear that God was asking me to do something very unique. However, I often ignored it. I always seemed to know that someday I would fall in love with the faith, but instead of giving it a try I labeled it as “too boring” for me. After being introduced to Saint Francis of Assisi I was radically inspired to give my life to God. I could totally relate to the saint and seemed to see the world as he did.

Francis grew up in a wealthy family as the oldest child. His parents always wanted the best for him and loved to boast of their son. From a young age Francis was loved among all his friends and the townspeople. During his youth, Francis developed bad habits with alcohol and

women. He was known for his mischief and partying. Francis had dreams of becoming a famous soldier, businessman, or something that brought him glory. He decided to pursue the soldier route because he felt that there was much glory in becoming a knight.

One day Francis received a dream from God to return home to Assisi. Francis obliged, despite all the humiliation he was going to receive from the townspeople. After spending some time at home, Francis began serving the poor, specifically lepers of the town. It was in serving the poor, that Francis had an encounter with Christ. Soon Francis began spending much time in prayer, serving the poor, and selling all his possessions. One day Francis received a call from Christ on the cross during prayer: "Francis, rebuild my church." Francis started to do just that! Literally he started rebuilding churches in the town of Assisi. Francis spent his time begging for tools and using his Father's money. When his Father found out about Francis' plans, he was furious. Francis' father dragged him in front of the bishop and demanded that Francis return all the money. Francis did just that; even stripping naked in front of the whole audience (and the bishop!) and giving his clothes back to his father. Francis went on to say: "From now on I can say with complete freedom: My Father who art in heaven" (Matz). Now Francis would be among the beggars in town. People laughed at him and his friends believed him to be mad. However, soon Francis started receiving a multitude of followers. Perhaps this was due to his attempt to live out the holy gospel (complete obedience to the words of Jesus in the bible). Francis then came to see that God was calling him to rebuild the church in a different way. Francis eventually founded a religious order the friars minor (lesser brothers). Over the years Francis would also found the Poor Clare's, a contemplative religious order for women, and the Third Order Regular (TOR), in which the laity (married and single) could join.

After visiting some Franciscan orders I felt a tug on my heart to join a community. However, I had to finish school first. Surprisingly, this became a huge struggle for me. My heart was in so many places and I wanted to serve Christ in a radical way, but first I had to finish what

I started: my education at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. All of this just did not make sense to me and once again I felt myself frustrated with God. I was trying to give my life to him in a radical way and it seemed like he would not take it. It was during this time I had trouble paying attention in class and performing well at my internship.

In an answer to many prayers, God gave me a weapon that has formed who I am today: Redemptive Suffering. As mentioned previously Redemptive Suffering is a Roman Catholic belief that we can unite our pain to Jesus as an active prayer for ourselves, others, and the world. Catholics often practice what is called a *morning offering*. As one starts their day they offer their pain, joys, and sufferings for specific intentions. This is not some “far-out” theology; it is backed by numerous passages in scripture<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, Christ gives us this as a way to follow in his footsteps.

I soon learned that my little pain, frustration, and confusion could be used for a greater benefit. This could be my active prayer throughout the day. I would often imagine how some of the worst suffering Jesus endured was mental. People were always confused about Jesus’ teaching and miracles. In fact, Jesus even had to constantly correct his disciples. Often during his life Jesus attempted to flee from crowds and spend time in prayer with God, but was interrupted. I too desired to spend more time in prayer, but was not able. I realized that my pain was nothing compared to Jesus, but it certainly spurred reflecting on his life. The other source of was inspiration was thinking about a friend who was ill or who I wanted to know Christ. I could “offer up” my pain or frustration for him/her. A few times I would see the fruit, other times I’m not sure what God did with my prayers. Regardless, he used it through faith! As Pope John Paul II says “a source of joy is found in overcoming the sense of uselessness of suffering” (Paul II). I started to find even more meaning in suffering and even mild joy in it. I was doing God’s work just by

---

patiently enduring the trials of everyday life. John Paul comments further on this new meaning I explained above in his letter on suffering:

“Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ, a special grace. To that grace many saints, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and others, owe their profound conversion. A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the salvific meaning of suffering but above all that he becomes a completely new person.” (Paul II)

With redemptive suffering, I experienced a paradigm shift. In prior uncomfortable circumstances I would often seek to escape the suffering. This would most likely lead to irrational decision making or giving up on something or a situation, which in the long run, would bring about despair. In defense of the actions of my past, what good reason would there be for me to endure suffering? Suffering was meaningless; the only good that would come from suffering would be gratitude for future situations. However, if one finds meaning in suffering, then the individual will not be so quick to flee from it, but rather patiently endure it. This patience shows great love!

Through this new meaning I found myself not shirking from seemingly “meaningless tasks”, submitting to the present moment, enduring discomfort and pain, not getting depressed over disappointment, and most importantly praying unceasingly. I became more concerned with bringing others to Jesus and growing into a relationship with him than about my current state of life (Married Single, Priesthood, and Religious). I was finding greater love, in not getting what I always wanted. As St Therese says: “Love is nourished by sacrifice” (Therese). I began to find that I was not only thanking God or interceding for others during my set times of prayer, but also the way I carried myself; especially in regards to sacrifices.

Even if to me, ten minutes were wasted talking to someone, I could “offer that up” to God for someone, some general intention, or that person. If I was injured emotionally or



physically, I could give that to God and pray for someone. There was no magic formula to what I was trying to do. However, I knew that you could either run from suffering or see it as an opportunity. I started to see suffering as an opportunity to love, to become a martyr, and to build character. Through redemptive suffering one has faith in the fact that their suffering has value. I now would like to share a story with you of how Saint Francis sheds light on this mysticism of suffering.

St. Francis' walked everywhere and it was a form of prayer for him. One this specific trip Francis was accompanied by Brother Leo. They were returning to the friary during winter. Leo lamented that he was cold, tired, and hungry. Francis then said: "Brother Leo, do you know what perfect joy is?" "No, Father Francis, I do not," Leo responded. Francis replied, "If the brothers had all the knowledge in the world and were able to share it with all mankind, would that be perfect joy?" Before Leo could answer, Francis retorted, "No, it would not." They continued to walk in silence, Then Francis said, "Brother Leo, if we brothers could heal every disease and raise the dead, would that be perfect joy? No. No, it would not." "Brother Leo, if we brothers were able to preach so that every person would be converted to God and his love, would that be perfect joy?" Leo wanted to say yes, but instead knew that was not the answer to Francis' question. "No, it wouldn't," shouted Francis. "Mark it well, it would not be." They continued to walk for miles in silence. Finally Leo spoke: "Father Francis, for the love of God, tell me what perfect joy is." Francis smiled at Leo and said: "Brother Leo listen carefully. We are only a few miles away from our friary. Notice the weather is getting worse. If we knock loudly on the door, should Brother Porter answer, who is old and half-blind, and he should ask us, 'Who are you?' we would say, 'It is Francis and Leo, let us in.' And Brother Porter might say 'You are liars and thieves. Francis is not expected until

tomorrow. Go away.’ And he would slam the door in our face. That, Brother Leo, is perfect joy.” Leo tried to object, but was interrupted by Francis. “And so, after waiting, trying to warm our bodies, we knock again. This time Brother Porter comes to the window and yells at us, ‘Be gone, you vermin, do not make me angry,’ and he throws a pail of greasy kitchen water on us. It freezes to our skin. That, Brother Leo, is perfect joy.” Leo was shocked. He even forgot his own misery. Francis then said: “So we wait, Brother Leo, until we can’t any longer, and we knock again, weeping, crying out to please, for the love of God, let us in, even if it’s to sleep in the kitchen hallway, and Brother Porter rushes out with a knobby stick, yelling ‘All right, I’ll teach you two murderers a lesson,’ and he beats us with the stick and throws us into the mud. Then he bolts the door shut and goes off to bed. That,” Francis shouted, “is perfect joy!” Brother Leo was terribly confounded. “Brother Leo, it is easy to find joy in a beautiful day, a good meal, comfortable sleep. Brother Leo it is easy to say ‘Thank you, God,’ for all the good things of life. But Leo, do you thank God for the difficult portions of life? Can we be in despair and still be warmed by God’s love? If the answer is “yes”, then we know perfect joy. When our souls are in distress, can we say ‘Thank you, Lord’ and mean it in our heart? We should welcome our tribulations, trials, and sufferings for they truly can bring us closer to God, they can strengthen us. There are no problems, Brother Leo, there is only God”. (Fish)

What I believe Francis is trying to explain in this story is that we do not find the highest form of happiness in our circumstances, but rather in love of God. Having necessary needs and certain material wants met, order in our lives, and family and friends that love us, are all good things to have in life. However, how do we respond when some of them are taken away? Are we left, hopeless and alone? Do we live our lives in constant fear of losing those things that are out of our

control? If God is our foundation, we cannot falter. Like a palm tree in the storm, we will blow back and forth, but after the storm we will remain. Whereas those that only find happiness based upon their current state of life are like an oak tree, when the storm comes they will be tore into pieces. Francis finds joy in suffering, because he turns to God and thanks him. Francis sees suffering as an opportunity to grow in virtue because he sees it as a test of will. Also, through suffering Francis can ultimately unite himself closer to Jesus Christ Crucified. Rooted behind redemptive suffering is love. Our sacrifices both involuntary and voluntary are a way we can show love for our brothers and sisters. This is truly great love because it is often something that is not seen. Through redemptive suffering I found unconditional joy! My happiness was found in God, not the circumstances surrounding me. This focus on God allows the individual to draw their focus to eternal life. Those that understand redemptive suffering do not get caught up in the selfishness, negativity, and hopelessness of the world; they know they have a weapon they can use forever.

### **Unhealthy relationship with Pain and Suffering in Christianity**

Some non-believers argue that there is an unhealthy fascination with pain and suffering in Christianity. The most famous person to fully form the argument was the famous atheist Fredrich Nietzsche, who believed Christianity was an attempt by an oppressed people to make suffering a good thing. Travis Denneson, a graduate philosophy student at Minnesota, explains Nietzsche's conclusion below:

“Nietzsche argues that the Jewish God was once one which embodied the virtues of a proud powerful people, but once they become subjugated by the Romans their God began to embody the “virtues: of an oppressed, resentful people (Denneson) .” Nietzsche believed the vision of God in New Testament was wrong. He had trouble understanding why there was such a

radical transformation between the past and present idea of God. In the Old Testament God seemed to be powerful, just, and responsive to evil. In the New Testament God seemed to exalt the weak and the poor. God was hidden and worked through his “holy ones”. Nietzsche’s main argument in the *Antichrist* is the following: “The slave class (Jews), out of hatred and resentment, got revenge on the noble class (Romans) by shaming them into accepting the slave class morality” (Denneson). Behind this thought is the notion that man created religion as a means to escape suffering. That Christianity’s version of God changed, so they could become more powerful. Which ultimately leads to the question: do Christians focus on suffering too much?

Some believe Christians celebrate suffering for sufferings sake or try to make it appear beautiful. In response to the objection, I think the easiest place to start is with the crucifixion. For thousands of years men and women throughout the world have been elevating the torture of one man; Jesus Christ. To non-Christians, agnostics, and atheists this not only seems foolish, but disturbing. Most pictures of Jesus involve his death on a cross. Christians claim to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Does that mean they all desire to be crucified like Christ? Furthermore, the Catholic saint (a holy follower of Jesus Christ) brings together a different walk of life based on sacrifice. Christianity appears to take something that is completely against our human nature; suffering, and elevate it as something we all should desire. This is truly a revolt against society. When one studies the lives of the saints one finds them not only accepting suffering, but desiring it. Nietzsche is disgusted with Christians rewarding (in his mind) weakness and sickness that Nietzsche believes we should overcome. Christianity takes good things like wealth and social status and tries to make them less appealing. Christianity seems to try to guilt people into following its course of path. What is the method behind Christianity’s madness?

For my purposes, in the following essays I will not argue with Nietzsche’s philosophical criticism of Christianity, but for the sake of brevity I would like to examine how suffering is depicted in Christianity, through two well-known films: *the Seventh Seal* and *the Passion of*

*Christ*. The seventh seal addresses a bad direction Christianity could possibly head in, if the focus became more on suffering than on God. The Passion of Christ, to some, seems to present this idea that Christians are more fixated on Christ's torture than his message.

### **The Seventh Seal**

Let's start with Ingmar Bergman's film: *The Seventh Seal*. The film focuses on the silence of God in the face of evil. This movie highlights many potential issues in Christianity, but I am going to focus on one worry posed by the film: the dangerous fixation of the judgment of God. Bergman growing up in a strong Christian (Lutheran) background grapples with his frustration with Christianity in the film, especially through the central character: Antonius Block. Block questions the existence of God throughout the movie in search of truth. Block says things like: "It's hard to conceive God with the senses." "Why would he hide himself in a midst of half spoken promises and unseen miracles?" Block is frustrated with the "little ways" God seems to speak to people. Would not an infinite being make his presence more clear? Block says "he wants knowledge, not belief." Block wants the inside scoop on the mind of the infinite. He wants to know the infinite personally and learn how he works. Block wants an answer to this question of suffering, most specifically for instances like World War II.

Something that caught my attention in the film was the failure to convey that prayer is the way to communicate with the infinite. Prayer is a relationship with God, inviting him into our life, and growing in love. Block says in the film: "we make an idol out of fear and call it God." Block is inferring that religion is something created by man to deal with suffering. Certainly Block has some truth to what he is saying here. In the past, this idea of "fearing" God was especially prevalent in Catholicism. Catholic churches used to be packed by hundreds of people on Sunday. They were going so they would not go to hell. However, they were not necessarily

authentically praying or entering into a relationship with God. In this sense one is fulfilled just by getting “their church in.” Worshipping becomes more about ritual than relationship. This issue is not as widespread in the church anymore, but still exists. To this day, many Christian teachers of faith forget to explain to people that “fear” in the Old Testament actually means “reverential awe of God; a reverence for His power and glory” (Houdmann). This confusion has to deal with translation of the Hebrew scripture text. Despite the flawed perspective of many in the church, it’s not fear that enables one to have a relationship with God. One must recognize God as a Father, as a source of life, so one is not trapped by his/her circumstances in life. We live in a society where people allow fear to be the basis of their decisions. They do not want to lose friendships, significant others, jobs, and the like. This type of decision making breeds mediocrity. As Pope Francis says “those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore” (Francis). Furthermore, one does not choose to *truly* serve Jesus Christ because of fear. Those who join the army just because they do not want to go to hell are fakers and Satan will surely sniff them out!

So how do we come to know God? This comes from a personal encounter, which can happen in numerous ways. During this encounter with infinite, this moment, the individual feels a sense of love, of belonging to something bigger than one self. They realize for the first time that no matter how great their sins, their failures, that God ultimately loves them more than the finite mind can comprehend. Once one enters into a relationship with God they are enabled to overcome suffering based on certain circumstances because of this feeling of love not fear. In summary, Christianity is not a response to suffering; it’s a response to love, to being called by the infinite. One of the fruits of knowing the infinite is to be freed from suffering. This manifests itself not in a physical sense, but in an emotional and spiritual sense.

## **The Passion of Christ**

Another popular display of Christianity in literature and film is the *Passion of Christ*. This film is directed by popular Hollywood actor Mel Gibson who is a traditional Catholic. The film follows the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and focuses on the passion of Jesus Christ. For those not familiar, when a Christian says “the passion” they are referring to a series of events in which Jesus Christ is handed over to the Jews, sentenced to death, humiliated, scourged, crowned with thorns, forced to carry the cross he would be crucified with, and then finally being crucified. The passion of Christ is my favorite movie because I love how real and moving the story becomes to the viewer. The cinematography and acting are stellar. However, I do agree with Catholic news, that Gibson by “only focusing on the passion muted some of Christ’s teachings, making it difficult for those unfamiliar with the New Testament.” (Pare et. al.) However, the passion of Christ is the one of the most central themes of our faith. In fact, everything can pretty much be summed up in Christ’s one act for humanity. This central point is what God did for humanity. From this we look at Jesus Christ as a savior, not just a teacher.

However, I must mention that Gibson’s movie was controversial and many felt that the extreme violence was absolutely unnecessary. A Slate film critic, David Edelstein calls it “The Jesus Christ Chain-saw massacre” (Edelstein). A critic from New York Times says: “The Passion of the Christ is so relentlessly focused on the savagery of Jesus’ final hours that this film seems to arise less from love than from wrath, and to succeed more in assaulting the spirit than in uplifting it” (Scott). A.O. Scott, the critic, walked away from the movie with little joy and a distorted image of what he envisioned the Christian God to be: A God of mercy. In my opinion, Scott misses the numerous scenes in the passion where God’s mercy is emphasized: Jesus heals his own capturers’ ear, Jesus defends the Samaritan woman, Jesus asks God to forgive those who are putting him to death, and Jesus forgives those who are being crucified with him. Certainly Scott

has a point here because Gibson only covers the Passion of Christ and at the end a quick flash of the resurrection. Perhaps Gibson was planning to make another movie, however I certainly agree that there could be more of an expansion on the joy of the resurrection of Jesus. Left out from the movie is the story of the present church today: Christians familiar with the bible know this book is called Acts of the Apostles. This book recounts the important formation of the church after the death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven of Jesus.

Scott seems to feel that “Gibson’s version of passion was harrowingly violent” (Scott). Nevertheless, if many were converted or convinced to give their lives to following *the way* of Jesus and billions are still captivated by the story today, I would imagine it would have been pretty gruesome. In fact, I would argue to say that some Sunday school explanations are “conveniently” explained so people can handle it. As Mr. Scott says about the tone of the movie:

“Mr. Gibson has departed radically from the tone and spirit of earlier American movies about Jesus, which have tended to be palatable (if often extremely long) Sunday school homilies designed to soothe the audience rather than to terrify or inflame it.”

Scott accurately describes past movies about Jesus. Homilies or movies, specifically about Jesus should present the viewer with the idea: Jesus painfully suffered and died for me. The message should pose the audience to make a decision. Am I going to follow Christianity or not? There should be no comfort zone! Never once in the bible does it say when the Holy Spirit comes down everyone is comfortable. Unfortunately many Christians today desire things of the world more than Jesus Christ. Present day critics will think the violence is over exaggerated because they fail to put themselves in the shoes of Jesus’ time on earth. During that time religion was the center of everyone’s life. When you have a religious figure performing miracles, attracting followers, condemning other religious practices and saying he’s the “son of God” he’s going to get persecuted and tortured severely. Furthermore, Roman historian Linda Alchin tells us on her website: “crucifixion was considered a most shameful and disgraceful way to die and condemned



Roman citizens were usually exempt from crucifixion (Alchin). When the Romans crucified someone it was to make a public statement. To make people afraid of making the same “mistakes” that the crucified person had made. Based on roman history, the passion of Jesus Christ would be extremely violent and bloody! Authentic believers want to see what Jesus tangibly did for us. Mediocrity and softening the message is not going to cut it. Scott goes as far as saying the picture is like a “horror film” (Scott). I beg to differ; I never once got the vibe of worrying or panicking what would happen next. There was not scene when people were jumping out or uncertainty was looming in the air. Unless, one was completely unfamiliar with the story, you knew what was coming.

In summary, I believe Gibson’s Passion of Christ accurately portrays the immense torture Jesus went through during his death. Furthermore, I think the spirituality of the person watching the movie makes a big difference. A non-believer or non-Christian may see the evil surrounding the torture of Jesus and be more focused on that. However, with a Christian perspective one might see a greater emphasis on God’s mercy than just torture. As a Christian sometimes it can be hard to believe you’re really forgiven for many of the terrible things you’ve done. By watching this movie one see’s what Jesus went through for you. Throughout the movie, you see Jesus constantly healing and forgiving, even those who are evil. This movie does a good job of shedding light on the face that God’s greatest attribute is his mercy. God beautifully displays this through his son Jesus.

### **Christianity: a response of Love**

In response to non-believer claims I would like to propose that Christianity is not a response to guilt the proud, wealthy, and righteous by glorifying suffering as the greatest good.

Christianity is a response to suffering which is love and mercy. The Catholic Church is not a Ponzi-scheme or conspiracy theory. It was instituted by Jesus Christ to the apostles. As I brought up in the introduction, we see this in the scriptures:

“So I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (*New American Bible*, Matt. 16:18-19)

We see here that Jesus institutes religion because he knows that it is necessary for us to have the church, to have community. Because Christians believe Jesus was God, we can say The Catholic Church was not created by man, but by God. We see countless times throughout Jesus’ public ministry in the bible that Jesus does seek out those who suffer greatly: the lepers, the diseased, the poor, the possessed, prostitutes, and the outcasts of society. Jesus seeks them out because of the compassion in his heart. Jesus has a strong desire to help his brothers and sisters who are ignored by the vast majority of society. Jesus does not do this to exalt himself or to make the poor become more powerful. Jesus even after he performs miracles often says: “Do not tell anyone” (*New American Bible*, Lk. 5:14) and also that “Everyone that exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (*New American Bible*, Lk. 7:11). Jesus heals them because he loves them.

Christians try to survive not shame. The early Christians were persecuted by both the Jews and the romans. They attempted to win over their neighbors with kindness. I would like to illustrate this point once again with a story about Saint Francis. One day, the friars were robbed by two villains from a nearby town. The brothers wanted to leave the friary, chase after the thieves, and beat them. Francis, being the superior, insisted the brothers stay put as he went after the thieves. After catching up with them, Francis fell to his knees and began begging the thieves to keep what they had taken, but to please come back and join the brothers for dinner. Confused,

the thieves obliged and joined the friars for dinner. After experiencing the love Francis and his brothers showed them after just haven taken their daily necessities, the thieves were converted. It is also said, that the thieves eventually became brothers in the Franciscan order! Nietzsche and others fail to see that the motive that drives authentic Christians is love, not a desire for power or honor. Christians desire to win over one thing and that is another's soul for God.

Are Christians too focused on suffering and pain? Do they celebrate suffering for sufferings sake? Peter Kreeft doesn't seem to believe so in his essay *God's answer to suffering*:

What then is suffering to the Christian? It is Christ's invitation to us to follow him.

Christ goes to the cross, and we are invited to follow to the same cross. Not because it is the cross, but because it is his. Suffering is blessed not because it is suffering but because it is his. Suffering is not the context that explains the cross; the cross is the context that explains suffering. The cross gives this new meaning to suffering; it is now not only between God and me but also between Father and Son. The first between is taken up into the Trinitarian exchanges of the second. Christ allows us to participate in his cross because that is his means of allowing us to participate in the exchanges of the Trinity, to share in the very inner life of God. (Kreeft)

Kreeft is saying when we follow Jesus suffering becomes an act of love. Christians do not seek suffering<sup>8</sup>, but if it comes they embrace it with love. We look it as an opportunity to grow, a test from God, and offer it as a prayer to Christ. I believe Christians are more focused on love and I can explain with another story. Imagine you were very ill and a doctor who you've never met shows up at your door. The doctor is the most kind, joyful, and caring person you've ever met. It only gets better though because the doctor actually heals you. You develop a relationship with this doctor and see how he loves everyone in town. You admire his way of life and there are

---

countless others he heals. As you continue to follow the doctor around you start to see some people are becoming jealous of him. Some of these people become so envious of this man's love that they kill him. While the groups of murderers are in the process of killing your doctor, you are amazed because you see the doctor forgiving them and not fighting back over his life. After the doctor dies, the group of murders start going after those whom the doctor healed. Now the doctor's followers are being killed, in some instances, in gruesome ways. The doctor in my story is Jesus and the followers are his early apostles. I make this point to show why people are so captivated by the life of Jesus Christ and especially his death. Even if we throw out the spiritual realities behind the life and death of Jesus, the human element should be enough to move one's heart. Like going to a wake, we celebrate his death and suffering for us because we remember his life and love for us. We are not just focusing on the suffering, were focusing on the love he showed and his earthly life.

Suffering is inevitable; you either fear it or you don't. Authentic Christians do not fear suffering like the rest of the world. They're not afraid to suffer in the name of Jesus or for what they believe. This is not glorifying suffering, but rather making it disappear by acts of great love. When we look at people who died for what they believed in we see purpose, courage, and love. We call them heroes because instead of choosing fear they choose faith. Christianity is a response to evil through developing a personal relationship with God and following the example of Jesus Christ. Love overcomes all evil.

## Appendix

### Scripture Meditations

The following meditations are not meant as further evidence for the existence of God or debate as in the chapters above. These are rather personal messages I would like to leave the reader with after conversing with the Creator himself in his word.

“Where, O death is your victory?

Where, O death is your sting.”

1 Corinthians 15:55-56

I would like to challenge the reader to examine their current feelings toward death. On planet earth; funerals, death, and mourning are all tied together. However, I have never met a saintly or even rational person who wanted people to weep and wallow over their death. Why is this so? Is it because the person who is dying is considerate and does not want to ruin other people's lives? Perhaps, but the truth of the matter is that death (in most but not all cases) should be a celebration! Especially to those who call themselves Christians. Practicing Christians believe in a God, who is all good, loving, and merciful, so what do we have to fear? Will we not spend the next life with him? Truly, eternal life is filled with joy, peace, and holiness. If this is true, why are we not celebrating death? Why do we automatically correlate death and suffering? I am not trying to suggest mourning is wrong, ultimately due to the way we are designed, mourning is necessary! However, at some point we have to realize that even death, the greatest loss, thanks to Jesus Christ, brings about the greatest good: eternal life. Yes, a loss of a loved one might cause us personally to suffer. However, it is for our sake that we weep and grieve. Rather as believers we should strive to shake off this selfishness and rejoice because our loved ones are with Our Father (or on their way) and through the eyes of faith we see they will be able to do more good for the

world by prayer. As Saint Paul says in Colossians 1:24 “For to me Christ is life and death is gain.” Someone who dies and trusts in the infinite mercies of God will only have much to gain. I propose this notion to force the reader to re-evaluate their opinion on suffering after reading this essay. All of those who believe in an afterlife should really think deeply about what that means to our present situation. We look at certain evils such as cancer, natural disasters, and illnesses as horrible and horrendous. They certainly are, but through an eternal perspective, we can see the positives far outweigh the good. Perhaps these evils are preparing our loved ones for their destined glory in heaven. For this reason we should rejoice!

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Matthew 16:24-25

The road is marked with suffering for all, especially the follower of Jesus. Jesus tells us we cannot make our own needs the center of our existence. If we spend our time in life trying to serve ourselves we will only find death, emptiness, and brokenness. It does not matter how much wealth we amass, how many friends we make, and how much education we have. All these things will ultimately perish. However, if we give our life to Jesus and try to serve him, we will find fulfillment. I have spent countless days of my life suffering for no reason. It's this useless suffering we experience that brings the greatest torment. How could there be no meaning! So many people suffer for no reason at all. The answer is right here in this scripture verse. Follow Jesus Christ! God came down and suffered with us, so that we might find meaning in our suffering. Give it all to Jesus!

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is nor rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does brood over injury. It does not rejoice over wrong doing, but rejoices with truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

St. Paul uses these 15 verbs because they are specifically being neglected in the Corinthians Christian community. I still think these verbs consequentially describe the lack of love found in the world today, especially in the United States. In my thesis I have shown that I believe love, mercy, and compassion to be the driving force that defeats evil. St. Catherine of Siena says “Everything comes from Love, all is ordained for the salvation of man. God does nothing without this goal in mind” (Siena). In my essay I attempted to show that this is the best possible world because it allows for the highest forms of love to exist. In order to love, one has to overcome an internal evil: selfishness. One must turn from sin to love God with all his mind, soul, and heart. One must deny himself to help another. As St Therese of Lisieux says “Love is nourished only by sacrifices” (Therese). Higher forms of love are exhibited when one is forced to love an enemy. One must look past the evil deeds committed by another and try to love them. God himself is love! When one looks at these verbs they come to better understand God the Father and also reflect on the life of Jesus Christ. God looks past our dirt and failures. He freely chose to create us and so we now must freely choose to serve him.

I would like to point out that the first thing mentioned about love is that it is “patient.” In one of my favorite prayers of all time, St Theresa of Avila says: “Patience obtains all things”. We

see this in the life of Christ who patiently suffers for us, knowing a greater good lies ahead: eternal salvation. Christ is patient with all the people he encounters in the gospels: great sinners, his disciples, and even those who reject him. We live in a society that fosters self-centeredness, impatience, and comfort. It's no wonder we have no patience! We have no concept of patience or of delayed gratification. The cliché "good things come to those who wait" has become more like "you only live once, do not ever deny yourself." Instead secular American should chew on this: "You only live once, so be holy!"

It's no wonder why we cannot accept evil and suffering, something that requires exquisite patience. We are losing the concept of putting up with difficulties to inherit something greater later. Sadly, this is one of the greatest ways to show love! The purpose of our existence is to love, God and our neighbor. When making decisions we can never go wrong when thinking: what does love/charity demand in this current situation?

In this same fashion, in order for one to know God, they must feel loved by him. Often God uses those who already serve him to show his love. This places an incredible burden on the believer. As Christians, if we truly love God and others, we like Jesus, must thirst deeply to bring others to know God's love. God is absolutely nothing other than love!

## Notes

1. Grace: free and unmerited favor of God (google dictionary)
2. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine: religious education program in the Catholic Church designed for children
3. Invitational: Large track meets where each team registers it's best 2 runners/jumpers/throwers for each event.



4. Eucharistic Adoration: Adoration is a sign of devotion to Jesus Christ, who is believed by Catholics to be present Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity, under the appearance of the consecrated host or bread. The Eucharist is placed in a monstrance and is adored by all the faithful. It most often is silent, but at large gatherings praise and worship songs are often sung as well.

5. Catholic belief in which Jesus Christ is truly present under bread and wine. This is instituted during the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-30)

6. Catholics hold dear to their hearts Jesus' last words on the cross to his disciple John: "Woman behold your son, son behold your mother" (John 19:26-27). We are called to have a relationship with Mary the Mother of God. We often ask Mary to pray for us here and those whom we love.

7. Some passages in scripture that highlight the theology behind the concept of redemptive suffering: Col 1:24, Mark 8:34, 1 Petr. 4:13

8. Christians do not seek suffering, but if it comes they embrace it with Love. Christians however often make small sacrifices of their time, money, or from daily necessities to grow in virtue and love of their neighbor.

## Works Cited

- Alchin, Linda. "Roman Crucifixion." *Tribunes and Triumphs* .n.p., 2008. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.
- America, C. &. "What is Chron's Disease". *Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America*.n.p., 2013. Web. 12 Dec. 2013.
- Beale, Stephen. "The Problem of Natural Evil." *Catholic Exchange*. n.p., 26 November 2013. Web. 21 Mar. 14.
- Beebe, James R. "Logical Problem of Evil." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.n.p., 2014. Web. 10 Feb. 14.
- Craig, William Lane. "The Problem of Evil." *BeThinking.Org*. n.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 14.
- Denneson, Travis. "Nietzsche's The Antichrist". *The Secular Web*. Internet Infidels, 1995. Web. 7 Jan. 14.
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor. "The Problem of Evil". *Lander Philosophical Inquiry*. n.p., n.d. Web. 24 March 14.
- Edelstein, David "Jesus H. Christ" *Slate*. The Slate Group, 4 February 2004. Web. 28 Jan. 14.
- Fish, Robert PH.D. "Perfect Joy, A Story of St. Francis." *Robertfish.com*. n.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb. 14.
- Fradd, Matt. "C.S. Lewis on Lust, Women, and Masturbation." *Catholic Answers*. n.p., 27 March 2013. Web. 18 Dec. 13.
- Francis, Pope. "The Joy of the Gospel." *Vatican Archives*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 24 November 13. Web. 31 Jan. 14.

Houdmann, S. Michael. "What does the Bible say about fear." *Got Questions?. org* . n.p., n.d.

Web. 31 Jan. 14.

Keating, Karl. *What Catholics Really Believe*. San Francisco: Ignatius Pess, 1992. Print.

Kreeft, Peter . "God's Answer to Suffering." *Peter Kreeft.com*. Ignatius Press, 1 July 1986. Web.

29 January 14.

Koukl, Greg. (2012, December 20). "Augustine on Evil." *Stand to Reason*. n.p., 20 December

2012. Web. 11 Feb. 14.

Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1978, Print.

Matz, Terry. "St Francis of Assisi." *Catholic Online*. n.p., 1996. Web. 31 Dec. 13.

*New American Bible*. St Joseph Medium Size Ed. Catholic Book Publishing Co. New York:

Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1992. Print.

Oxford Dictionary. "Freedom." *Oxford Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2014. Web.

20 Mar. 14.

Paul II, Pope John "Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris." *Vatican Archives*. Libreria Editrice

Vaticana, 1984. Web. 31 Dec. 13.

Paul II, Pope John. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Rome: Libreria editrice vaticana, n.d Print.

Pare, Gerri, DiCerto, David, and Navarro, Anne. "Film Review: The Passion of Christ."

*American Catholic.Org*. Catholic News Service, February 2004. Web. 15 Jan. 2014.

Peterson, Michael L. *God and Evil*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, Print.

Powers, Mary Fishback. "Footprints in the Sand." *Only the Bible*. n.p., 2008. Web. 17 Dec. 13.

Scott, A. O. (2004, February 25). "Good and Evil Locked in Violent Showdown." *New York Times*. The New York Times Company, 25 February 2004. Web. 28 Jan. 14.

Siena, Catherine. "Love." *Saint Quotes*. WhiteLilyofTrinity, 2009. Web. 28 Mar. 14.

Team, Reap. "Is Masturbation a Sin?" *Reap Team*. n.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 14.

Therese of Liseux. "Saint therese quotes." *Blogspot*. Blogger, n.d. 28 Mar. 14.

Wainwright, William J. *Philosophy of Religion*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1999, Print.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alchin, Linda "Roman Crucifixion." *Tribunes and Triumphs* .n.p., 2008. Web. 29 Jan. 2014.

America, C. &. "What is Chron's Disease". *Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America*.n.p.,  
2013. Web. 12 Dec. 2013.

Beale, Stephen. "The Problem of Natural Evil." *Catholic Exchange*. n.p., 26 November 2013.  
Web. 21 Mar. 14.

Beebe, James R. "Logical Problem of Evil." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.n.p., 2014.  
Web. 10 Feb. 14.

Craig, William Lane. "The Problem of Evil." *BeThinking.Org*. n.p., n.d. Web. 9 Feb. 14.

Denneson, Travis. "Nietzsche's The Antichrist". *The Secular Web*. Internet Infidels, 1995. Web. 7  
Jan. 14.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. "The Problem of Evil". *Lander Philosophical Inquiry*. n.p., n.d. Web. 24  
March 14.

Edelstein, David. "Jesus H. Christ." *Slate*. The Slate Group, 4 February 2004. Web. 28 Jan. 14.

Fish, Robert PH.D. "Perfect Joy, A Story of St. Francis." *Robertfish.com*. n.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb.  
14.

Fradd, Matt "C.S. Lewis on Lust, Women, and Masturbation." *Catholic Answers*. n.p., 27 March  
2013. Web. 18 Dec. 13.

- Francis, Pope. "The Joy of the Gospel." *Vatican Archives*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 24 November 13. Web. 31 Jan. 14.
- Houdmann, S. Michael. "What does the Bible say about fear." *Got Questions?. org*. n.p., n.d. Web. 31 Jan. 14.
- Kreeft, Peter. "God's Answer to Suffering." *Peter Kreeft.com*. Ignatius Press, 1 July 1986. Web. 29 January 14.
- Kreeft, Peter. "The Problem of Evil." *Peter Kreeft.com*. Ignatius Press, 1 July 1986. Web. 1 November 14.
- Keating, Karl. *What Catholics Really Believe*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992. Print.
- Koukl, Greg. (2012, December 20). "Augustine on Evil." *Stand to Reason*. n.p., 20 December 2012. Web. 11 Feb. 14.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1978, Print.
- Matz, Terry. "St Francis of Assisi." *Catholic Online*. n.p., 1996. Web. 31 Dec. 13.
- New American Bible*. St Joseph Medium Size Ed. Catholic Book Publishing Co. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1992. Print.
- Oxford Dictionary. "Freedom." *Oxford Dictionary Online*. Oxford University Press, 2014. Web. 20 Mar. 14.
- Paul II, Pope John. "Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris." *Vatican Archives*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984. Web. 31 Dec. 13.
- Paul II, Pope John. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Rome: Libreria editrice vaticana, n.d Print.

Pare, Gerri, DiCerto, David, and Navarro, Anne. "Film Review: The Passion of Christ."

*American Catholic.Org*. Catholic News Service, February 2004. Web. 15 Jan. 2014.

Peterson, Michael L. *God and Evil*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998, Print.

Powers, Mary Fishback. "Footprints in the Sand." *Only the Bible*. n.p., 2008. Web. 17 Dec. 13.

Scott, A.O. (2004, February 25). "Good and Evil Locked in Violent Showdown." *New York*

*Times*.The New York Times Company, 25 February 2004. Web. 28 Jan. 14.

Siena, Catherine. "Love." *Saint Quotes*. WhiteLilyofTrinity, 2009. Web. 28 Mar. 14.

Team, Reap. "Is Masturbation a Sin?" *Reap Team*.n.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb. 14.

Therese of Liseux. "Saint therese quotes." *Blogspot*. Blogger, n.d. 28 Mar. 14.

Teresa of Calcutta. "Her Words." *EWTN*. Np., n.d. Web. 6 March 14.

Wainwright, William J. *Philosophy of Religion*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company,  
1999, Print.

# Stephen C. Galdo

## ACADEMIC VITA

scg5077@psu.edu

4701 College Drive, MB#889, Erie, PA 16563

(412) 951-9176

---

### **Education:**

The Pennsylvania State University, Erie, PA  
Schreyer Honors College  
B.S. in Management Information Systems  
Projected Graduation: May 2014

### **Work Experience:**

*GE Transportation* *Oct 2012 – Present*  
*Engineered Systems Co-op*

- Created SQL/Visual Basic automated tool that enables commodity leaders to pull information efficiently
- Managed teams list of 15,000 + parts and co-lead an initiative to recode cross referenced parts, lowering inflation
- Developed query to support South Africa team negotiations leading to savings of \$10 - \$15 million

*C&S Wholesale Grocers, Inc.* *May – Aug*  
2012

*Corporate Tax Intern*

- Assisted with multi-state tax compliance for nation's largest wholesale grocer, with more than \$20 billion in revenue
- Identified \$38,000 in annual report savings working for the hCue software implementation team

*DeMarco Wachter & Co. Certified Public Accountants* *Nov 2011 – May 2012*  
*Accounting Co-op*

- Organized client's books to match general accounting principles

### **Leadership Experience:**

*Missionary, Catholic Urban Project* *Summer 2013*

- Worked to support the poor, elderly, and sick in the greater Michigan area by helping run a free summer camp for youth and take part in various home improvement projects.

*Resident Assistant, Penn State Residence Life* *Apr 2011 – Present*

- Awarded rookie of the year based on ability to positively influence community and handle crisis situations with composure

*Vice President, Newman Club* *Apr 2012 – Present*

- Received special service implementation award for starting Waste Not and Spring Into Service.