



Where is God in Suffering,
Especially Mine?

Suffering and the Christian God

- God is not behind your pain
- God is with you in your pain
- God is ahead of your pain, pulling you through it

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God Is Not Behind Your Pain

Aristotle was interpreted:

Prime Mover → Effect A → Effect B → →→→→ Effect Z

God Is Not Behind Your Pain

Aristotle projected onto
Christian thought:

God → Effect A → Effect B → →→→→ Pain

God Is Not Behind Your Pain

Christian view of history:



God Is Not Behind Your Pain

Christian view of history:

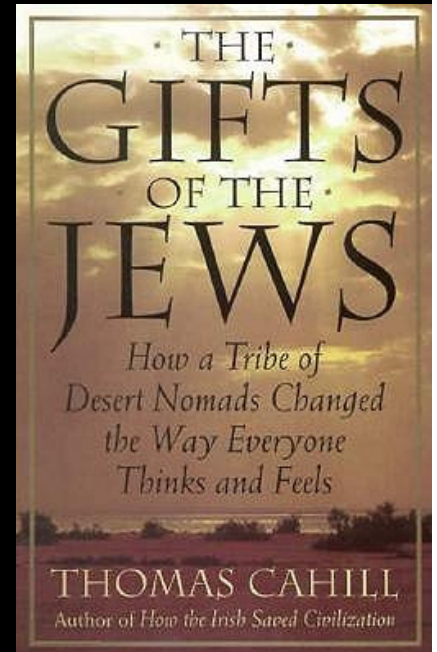
God	→	→	God will be
Angels	→		victorious
Humans	→		
Natural world	→		

God Acts By Speaking

- To Himself: ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. (Gen.1:3); ten times in Genesis 1
- To Abram: ‘I will redeem your descendants from bondage.’ (paraphrase of Gen.15:13 – 15)
- To Abram and Sarai: ‘You will have a son’ (Gen.17:15 – 19)
- To Samuel: ‘David will be king of Israel’ (1 Sam.16:1 – 13)
- Etc. etc.

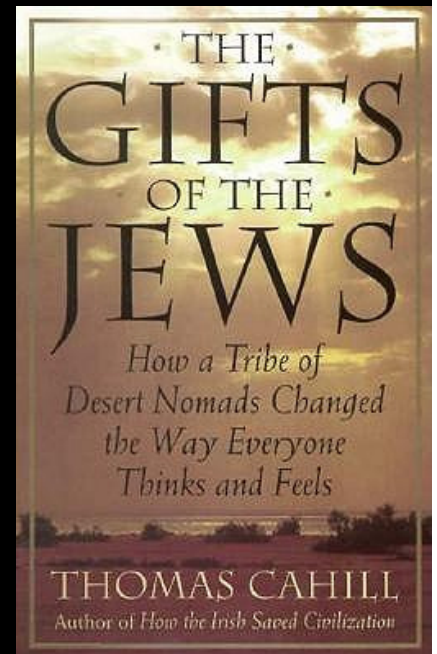
God Acts By Speaking

- The pattern: God speaks to act, and acts as He speaks
 - ‘Surely the LORD God will do **nothing** except that which He reveals to His servants the prophets.’ (Amos 3:7)
 - ‘Prophets’ are those to whom God speaks first
 - Notice that a doctrine of God’s omnicausality would contradict Amos 3:7 and the biblical pattern to which Amos was referring



God Acts By Speaking

- God's speech-acts
 - Do not cause the behavior of all people, only what He has spoken
 - Leave room for genuine human hope and free will
 - Give rise to linear history (promise-fulfillment)
 - Allow God to be 100% good, not partly evil
 - Give rise to the “happy ending”



God and Human Free Will

- God commits to being victorious over evil **by His word** (e.g. Gen.3:14 – 15)
- But God does not determine **everything** about the future, shown by
 - God’s regret (Gen.6:5 – 6; 1 Sam.15:10)
 - God’s moral outrage (Zech.1:15)
 - God saying, ‘I did not intend that’ (1 Ki.20:42; Isa.54:15)
 - God saying, ‘What more could I have done?’ (Isa.5:3 – 4; Jer.2:30; 3:6)
 - God testing people to see their heart because He didn’t know what they would do (Gen.22:1; Dt.8:2; 2 Chr.32:21; Jer.20:21)
 - God saying ‘if, maybe, perhaps’ about the future (Ex.4:8; Mt.21:1 – 3; Jer.26:2 – 3; Ezk.12:3)
 - Jesus not being sure when Jerusalem’s fall will happen (Mt.25:14 – 20)

God and Human Free Will

- God's Regret: Regret would not be an appropriate expression if God controlled a human being and they had no real choice:
 - Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord **was sorry** that He had made man on the earth, and He **was grieved** in His heart. (Gen.6:5 – 6)

God and Human Free Will

- God's Moral Outrage: showing that God was not pleased with the moral decisions of some people
 - But **I am very angry** with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, they furthered the disaster. (Zech.1:15)

God and Human Free Will

- God saying, 'I did not intend that': showing that God did not intend certain events
 - If anyone fiercely assails you **it will not be from Me.**
Whoever assails you will fall because of you. (Isa.54:15)

God and Human Free Will

- God saying, ‘What more could I have done?’ showing that God wanted a better human response
 - And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. **What more was there to do** for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? (Isa.5.3 – 4)

God and Human Free Will

- God testing people: God did not know what a person would actually decide
 - God **tested** Abraham (Gen.22:1)
 - The Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, **testing you**, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. (Dt.8:2)

God and Human Free Will

- God saying ‘if/may/maybe/perhaps’ about the future: showing that God was giving people a real choice
 - If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they **may** believe the witness of the last sign (Ex.4:8)
 - **Perhaps** they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent... (Jer.26:2 – 3)
 - Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey... And **if** anyone says something to you... (Mt.21:1 – 3)

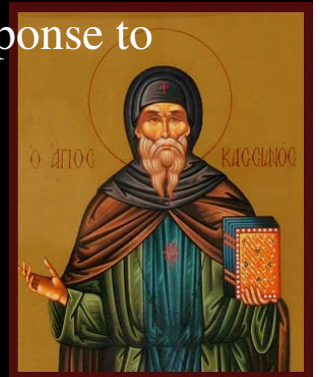
God and Human Free Will

- Jesus was not certain exactly when Jerusalem's fall would happen:
 - ‘...let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains... **But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.**’ (Mt.25:14 – 20)

God and Human Free Will



- Augustine's *monergism*?
 - 'One will' – God is *omnicausal*?
 - The fall, subsequent unbelief, evil, injustice, hell?
 - All earlier theologians believed in human free will to protect God's goodness
 - Collection of quotes: <http://nagasawafamily.org/article-free-will-in-patristics.pdf>
 - So did the early Augustine vs. the later
 - John Cassian
 - The 'Eastern Orthodox spokesman' wrote a sensitive, critical response to Augustine
 - Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, ch.4



God and Human Free Will

- Let's stop saying certain things that are not true
 - 'All things happen for a reason'
 - 'God is trying to tell you something'
 - 'God has a purpose behind this'
- Let's say things that are true
 - 'Not all things happen for a good reason, because of us'
 - 'God speaks to us through His Word' (Jesus, Scripture)
 - 'God's purpose is to redeem all things'

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God Is With You in Your Pain



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God Is Ahead of Your Pain



God Is Ahead of Your Pain

‘Although Christ took our filth upon himself, nevertheless he is not defiled by the pollution, but in his own self, he cleanses the filth, for it says, the light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not overpower it.’

- *Adversus Apollinarem* 26

‘Our diseased nature needed a healer. Man in his fall needed one to set him upright.’

- *The Great Catechism*, ch.15



Gregory of Nyssa (335 – 395 AD)
bishop, theologian, abolitionist

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