Sin, Evil and Job: Monotheism as a Psychological and Pastoral Problem

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The Book of Job, as interpreted by Jung and Capps, reveals that evil exists in creation and has its source in God. Evil is the inevitable result of God choosing to be subject to logical norms in order to avoid a chaotic world. However, according to religious tradition, the good in God outweighs the evil, which is why believers in God go to God for help even when God seems to inflict suffering upon them.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of evil—the question of why there should be evil in a world created by an all-powerful, loving God—is perhaps the most powerful argument against theistic religious belief. It is a question not only asked by academic philosophers of religion. Individuals who suddenly find themselves suffering for no good reason often ask the question, “Why is God allowing this to happen to me?” and seek answers from their clergy and religious traditions. It is the big unanswered question behind all of the Church’s pastoral care activities.

JUNG: GOD PSYCHOANALYZED

The Book of Job tells the tale of a challenge to God (Yahweh) by Satan, one of the beings in the heavenly court. Satan has been walking abroad

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on the earth, and God asks him, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one like him on all the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil" (Job 1.8). In return, however, Satan asks God a question about Job — a question that could be asked about many American Christians today! Since Job is rich and blessed by God, could it be that Job respects God only because of what God has done for him — "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (1.9). So Satan issues a challenge to God: if Job was afflicted with evil, would he still be so faithful to God? God gives Satan permission to test Job, and so Satan destroys Job's family and wealth and, when that is not enough to take away Job's trust in God, afflicts him with sores. Even his wife is unsympathetic to his plight (2.9).

In the face of such calamities, Job is at first silent. He then begins dialogues with three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—who have come to comfort him with standard theological and moral arguments, which Job rejects (there is also a speech by a character called Elihu, the main function of which seems to be to prepare for the entrance of God). Eventually God speaks to Job in a way which confounds both him and his friends. God accepts that Job is blameless, and, in an epilogue, more than restores Job's fortune and reputation.

Jung's treatment of the Book of Job is quite fascinating, if seemingly far-fetched. In effect, Jung psychoanalyzes Yahweh, asking what kind of a God we are dealing with here and how the incident with Job affects Yahweh psychologically. Jung sees the Book of Job as "a landmark in the long historical development of a divine drama" (p. 3) of God's dealings with humankind, out of which emerged a new understanding of God's character which led, in the end, to the Christian myth of the incarnation of God as a human being.

For Jung, God is an "archetype" which develops in the human unconscious over time. Thus, when Jung gives an account of the divine drama he gives, in effect, an account of "the development of symbolic entities [which] corresponds to a process of differentiation of human consciousness" (p. 107). Thus Jung's God is a rather different entity than the "maker of heaven and earth" of traditional Western theism. God is one of many religious archetypes who are present in, are shaping, and are shaped by the collective unconscious of Western people. It is not that God and the unconscious are simply the same. God is truly transcendent inasmuch as he (our use of the masculine pronoun here is intentional) exists beyond the imagination of any single person and is the creation of, and creator of, the collective unconscious. The story of the development of this collective unconscious is what Jung is attempting to trace in Answer to Job.

Yahweh, the God of Job's day, is at a relatively early stage of development — in fact, he has not yet developed real consciousness: