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MUSLIMS, JEWS AND CHRISTIANS ASKING GOD IN SUFFERING

MUSLIMOVÉ, ŽIDÉ A KŘEŠŤANÉ PTAJÍCÍ SE BOHA V UTRPENÍ

Virág Szentandrás

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci s názvem *Muslims, Jews and Christians Asking God in Suffering (Muslimové, židé a křesťané ptající se Boha v utrpení)* napsala samostatně a výhradně s použitím uvedených pramenů.

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ANOTACE

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá otázkou utrpení a zla z pohledu muslimských, židovských a křesťanských věřících. Podává malé nahlédnutí do bohatství islámské, židovské a křesťanské tradice v této tematicce. Soustřeďuje se hlavně na práci šesti vybraných autorů jako příklad různých odpovědí na výzvu utrpení ve vztahu k Bohu. V úvodních částech podává krátký vhled do problematiky teodiceje a pohledu na utrpení v tradicích islámu, judaismu a křesťanství. Práce následujících autorů jsou analyzovány důkladněji: Al-Ghazali, Attar a Navid Kermani, Hans Jonas, Elie Wiesel, Jürgen Moltmann a Johann Baptist Metz. Závěrečná kapitola obsahuje krátký pohled na Jóba a souhrnní zamyšlení nad odpovědí na výzvu utrpení.

Klíčová slova a jména:

Utrpení, Teodicea, Islám, Judaismus, Křesťanství, Al-Ghazali, Attar, Navid Kermani, Hans Jonas, Elie Wiesel, Jürgen Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz, Job

SUMMARY

This master thesis deals with the question of suffering and evil posed by Muslim, Jewish and Christian believers. It gives a small glimpse into the richness of the Islamic, Jewish and Christian traditions concerning this topic. By concentrating on the work of six chosen authors it provides different examples of confronting the challenge of suffering in relation to God. In the introductory parts it gives an insight into the topic of theodicy and the views on suffering in the traditions of each religion. The works of the following writers or theologians are analysed more thoroughly: Al-Ghazali, Attar and Navid Kermani, Hans Jonas, Elie Wiesel, Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz. The concluding section includes some brief observations on Job and reflections on the response to suffering in light of the whole work.

Keywords and names:

Suffering, Theodicy, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Al-Ghazali, Attar, Navid Kermani, Hans Jonas, Elie Wiesel, Jürgen Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz, Job

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Introduction

Introductory Notes

The purpose of the following thesis is not to give a full overview of the views on suffering and evil in the three monotheistic religions. It has a much humbler aim: to give an insight into the widths of the issue and to provide examples of various possible answers of believers when confronted with the reality of evil and suffering. From each religion I have tried to choose two authors (theologians or writers) whose works are examples of very different answers on the challenge of evil and suffering. There can be found some similarities in the answers of authors from different religions. However, it becomes remarkable to see the change of accents and the distinctions caused by some fundamental and important differences between these religions.

A certain asymmetry can be noticed in my presentation of the three religions, which is partly due to their specificity. For instance, Judaism has a strong sense of history, in Islam we can find a large variety of schools and branches, and in Christianity it is possible to orientate with the help of the church doctrines too. (The fact that I have focused on the traditions and thoughts found in the western Christianity show the incompleteness of the work). A special area in each religious tradition is the mystics. Unfortunately, I could not reflect on it more thoroughly. Concerning the authors, the chosen Jewish and Christian writers and theologians are all born in the 20th century and react on the terrors of that century. Regarding Islam I could not find a comparable contemporary literature about this topic in the languages I speak. Partly this is the reason for the choice of a recent and two medieval authors, but the look into other centuries provided me with the possibility to widen the glimpse of this work.

In the more or less critical remarks I enter into a dialogue with the Muslim, Jewish and Christian authors. The aim was not a neutral description, but rather an enriching dialogue. My standpoint is a Christian one. This work is insofar theological and it is not neutrally religionist. I was encouraged by the method of the Muslim author Navid Kermani: in his work he is in constant dialogue with Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions and views. Our critical discussions emerging by reading his book *The Terror of God* during a seminar helped us better understand not only the other traditions, but also our own. For me it also meant the deeper realisation of the Christian message. I find it crucial to be acquainted with other religions as well as to have a well-founded knowledge of our own tradition to be able to enter into a responsible dialogue. I did not give more space for a comparison or confrontation due to my lacking knowledge and the width of the topic. However, I hope that the insight into the different views and traditions speaks for itself and encourages for a speech with each other.

The topic I have chosen is very wide. However, I hope this work gives a small glance into the huge richness of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions concerning this topic. Not only did it mean a large enrichment to me as I dealt with it but it was also a relief to see the possibilities of how one can cope with the terrors of life not allowing the fall into despair. I would like to warn against every simplifying argument with which we may try to react on the legitimate questions emerging in the situations of suffering and experiences of evil.

The Question to God in Suffering and the Question of Theodicy

'God's only excuse is that He does not exist' – Nietzsche envies this dictum of Stendhal.¹ Georg Büchner writes in his work *Danton's Death*: 'First do away with the imperfect, and then you can demonstrate God; Spinoza tried it. One can deny evil, but not pain; only reasoning can prove God, feeling rebels against it. Consider this, Anaxagoras: why do I suffer? That is the very bedrock of atheism. The least quiver of pain, in even the smallest of atoms, makes a rent in creation from top to bottom.'² Ivan Karamazov could not accept the place where innocents have to suffer: 'And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket.'³

How can one believe in God when being confronted with the tremendous pain and destruction in the world? Even if humans are to be blamed, one could still ask: why freedom cannot be without this terrible flipside of it? Even if the aim is a greater perfection, how can an aim legitimate the sufferings and death of so many innocents? Is that not rather a demon or tyrant who is playing with us? How can we accept such a demonic 'God' and live like humans? The question of evil and suffering is a fundament for the protest atheism. However, what kind of world is that where the painful death of a child has the last word? How can we live and act in this hell and senselessness?

The belief in the merciful God does not give an explanation to the reality of evil, but it even stronger shows its negativity and scandalousness. The question of theodicy emerges necessarily in all monotheistic religions. The Koran emphasizes God's mercifulness and understandability. The question of theodicy is sharpened in Judaism by the riddle of election and the covenant between Israel and God.⁴ The Christian belief in the loving God seems to be incompatible with the presence of evil in the world.

It is important to note that I use the word theodicy mainly in a wide sense (similarly to Johann Baptist Metz): as a question to God when confronted with evil and suffering. The term itself has a different and narrower original sense: the attempt to justify or vindicate God in response to the problem of evil.⁵ The term was coined by Leibniz, but the problem was stated much earlier. Lactantius quotes Epicurus, who put the problem as follows: 'God either wishes to take away evils and he cannot, or he can and does not wish to, or he neither wishes to nor is able. If he wishes to and is not able, he is feeble, which does not fall in with the notion of god. If he is able to and does not wish to, he is envious, which is equally foreign to god. If he neither wishes to nor is able, he is both envious and feeble and therefore not god. If he both wishes to and is able, which alone is fitting to god, whence, therefore, are there evils, and why does he not remove them?'⁶ Or formulated by David Hume: 'Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he

¹ F. NIETZSCHE: *Ecce homo*, quoted in KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 19.

² K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 65; W. GROSS, K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Büh a zlo*, p. 90.

³ F. DOSTOYEVSKY: *The Brothers Karamazov*, quoted from: http://www.online-literature.com/dostoevsky/brothers_karamazov/35/

⁴ H. JONAS: *The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice*, p. 2.

⁵ Literally meaning: justification of God, justifying God

⁶ EPICURUS (quoted in LACTANTIUS: *The Wrath of God*, pp. 92f.), quoted in KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 82.

*malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?'*⁷ The classical problem of theodicy has three or four main presuppositions: the reality of evil on the one hand, and the divine attributes of omnipotence, benevolence and cognizability on the other hand.⁸ The theodicies in strict sense are attempts of logical coherency, trying to deal with the contradiction of these propositions. Kant found all such rational attempts doomed to failure: he proved that the human reason by its nature is incapable of fathoming theoretically this problem.⁹ Ricoeur notes that the way of posing the problem of theodicy in its strict sense has only limited and relative character and it could be called into question (its onto-theological mode of thinking, the propositional form, the rule of coherence).¹⁰ The rational theodicies attempt to render an intelligible account of existence.¹¹ Many of these theodicies are trying to give an account of one's belief in God in the face of the reality of evil, which challenges the trust again and again.¹² There are, however, important differences between the theodicies in strict sense and the questions to God in suffering. The latter ones represent open questions addressed directly to God. God is called to account by appealing to His revelations and promises. The ground for the questions is not only the striving for rational coherency, but first of all the existentially important relation to God, trust and hope in Him. The question is necessarily an open question, waiting and asking for an answer.¹³ Therefore, we can speak about theodicy in a different and wide sense (one speaks even about contra-theodicy).¹⁴ Examples of such questions can be found in the biblical literature, especially in the Laments and the Book of Job. According to Elie Wiesel Job could be seen as an embodiment of the problem of theodicy.¹⁵ The innocent suffering forms a core of this question.

Human life has been marked by the mystery of evil and suffering. In the given thesis I do not deal specifically with the philosophical problem of evil. Although in the question of theodicy the question of evil and suffering are very much joined, I would like to shortly point out some distinctions. We can differentiate between two basic types of evil: the moral and natural evil. Leibniz also spoke about metaphysical evil (death, finitude), and it is possible to add the notion of social evil too (injustice, exploitation)¹⁶, but these types can be included into the previous two basic categories. The borders between these categories of evil must not be always clear and relations can be found or stated. Evil can be characterized by its negativity, absurdity, destructivity. Suffering is not the evil itself, but it is a consequence and (warning) sign of evil (it can become a cause for further evil too, but it does not

⁷ D. HUME: *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, p. 88, quoted in E. L. ORMSBY: *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, p. 4.

⁸ Cf. H. JONAS: *The Concept of God afet Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice*, p.9; N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 99.

⁹ Kant's formulation of classical theodicy: *„die Verteidigung der höchsten Weisheit des Welturhebers gegen die Anklage, welche die Vernunft aus dem Zweckwidrigen in der Welt gegen jene erhebt.“* I. KANT: *Über das Mißlingen aller philosophischen Verusche in der Theodizee*. Quoted in *Wozu das Leid; Wozu das Böse?*, p. 20; Cf. ORMSBY, p. 10.

¹⁰ P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, in: *JAAR* 1985 LIII (4), p. 345.

¹¹ E. L. ORMSBY, p. 11.

¹² Cf. A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, pp. 144, 187.

¹³ Cf. G. NEUHAUS: *Menschliche Identität angesichts des Leidens*, in: *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben?*, pp. 20f.

¹⁴ According to Kant Job is an example of an ‚authentic theodicy‘ Cf. G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, pp. 333f.

¹⁵ Cf. E. WIESEL: *Alle Flüsse*, p. 244, quoted in B. WOLSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 85.

¹⁶ Cf. K-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 43.

need to).¹⁷ Suffering can be characterized as a diminution of one's physical, psychic, or spiritual integrity. If fault makes a person guilty, suffering makes a person a victim.¹⁸ As Ricoeur notes, it belongs to the mystery of evil that there is a strange experience of passivity even at the very heart of active evil (feeling to be a victim when being guilty).¹⁹

Elie Wiesel doubts that after Auschwitz we can speak about God - as Kafka said, we can only speak to God. Can there be a theology after this event? Wiesel answered the question: *'Personally I do not think so. There can be no theology after Auschwitz, and no theology whatsoever about Auschwitz. For whatever we do we are lost; whatever we say inadequate. One can never understand the event with God; one cannot understand the event without God. Theology? The logos of God? Who am I to explain God? Some people try. I think that they fail. Nonetheless, it is their right to attempt it. After Auschwitz everything is an attempt.'*²⁰ When asked by Milan Machovec whether there could be any prayer anymore for the Christians, Johann Baptist Metz answered: *'We can pray after Auschwitz, because there were prayers in Auschwitz.'*²¹ I understand theology as a kind of speech to God too, or to say, as an attempt of speech and a human witness to Him, with the belief that He listens and with the humbleness before the unreachable depth. The following human thoughts and views should be understood with this humbleness and with the hope that He will answer us.

Interrelation of Motives

We have to speak in plural of the religious interpretations of misfortune in the Jewish, Muslim and Christian literature. Navid Kermani emphasises that in many cases they developed through a process of reciprocal, inter-religious cross-fertilization. Concerning Sufism and Kabbalah he writes: *'In their structures, references, concepts and images, Jewish and Islamic mysticism within the Arab-influenced cultural realm have far more in common with each other than Islamic mysticism does with Islamic philosophy. [...] Conversely, the Arab philosophical debate shows a direct dialogue between Jewish and Muslim arguments.'*²² Early Islamic ascetism was influenced by the living example of Syrian monks and in Sufism one may find a piety close to some characteristics of Christian spirituality.²³ The confrontation with the problem of theodicy follows similar lines by the Jewish Sadia Gaon, Maimonides and the Islamic dialectical theology.²⁴ Far beyond its Koranic reception, Bible formed a part of classical Islamic erudition and culture.²⁵ According to Navid Kermani, we may talk about overlaps, interrelations, sometimes even symbiosis of Islamic, Jewish and Christian motives and

¹⁷ It is the subjective experience of evil. Suffering unmasks the evil as evil. Cf. R. SPAEMANN: *Die Christliche Sicht des Leidens*, in: *Das unsterbliche Gerücht. Die Frage nach Gott und die Täuschung der Moderne*, p. 216f.

¹⁸ P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, in: *JAAR* 1985 LIII (4), p. 346.

¹⁹ Cf. P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, p. 347.

²⁰ E. WIESEL, in *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 93, 95; English translation: https://books.google.cz/books?id=_dlKKEuTOAUC&source=gbs_navlinks_s

²¹ Cf. J. H. TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 161

²² N. KERMANI, p. 81.

²³ Cf. N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 193.

²⁴ N. KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils in der Welt*, in I. U. DALFERTH, K. LEHMANN, N. KERMANI: *Das Böse. Drei Annäherungen*. Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2011, p. 93

²⁵ The biblical motives and figures entered the Islamic culture through the Koran, Bible, by the word of mouth, through the tales of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*) and the *isrā' īlīyāt* (collections made by Islamic historians of biblical accounts and Jewish literary traditions), and also through convertites. KERMANI, p. 191.

discourses in the Middle East.²⁶ There are not only interrelations, but also some similar basic attitudes and reactions on the problem of suffering.

Although I have chosen an approach that deals with the question of suffering in the three religions separately, we have to keep in mind this emphasis on the possible interrelations and similarities. They will be noticeable, though, we will find important differences too.

²⁶ N. KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils in der Welt*, in: I. U. DALFERTH, K. LEHMANN, N. KERMANI: *Das Böse. Drei Annäherungen*. Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2011, p. 106.; Cf. N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 192-193.

Views on Evil and Suffering in Islam

According to Navid Kermani the question of theodicy in Islam is even more urgent than in Judaism and Christianity for the Koran clearly highlights God's omnipotence and the reasonable nature of his actions.²⁷ The question of God's justice, and hence the problem of theodicy, was one of the earliest questions in the dialectical theology of Islam.²⁸ There is no *one* uniform or coherent interpretation of evil in Islam, as the Koran itself does not provide consistent answers.²⁹ We should speak about religious interpretations of evil in plural.

The Koran emphasises God's omnipotence, goodness and recognisability.³⁰ According to the Koran, the creation is good and serves for the needs of people. Its harmony is manifest and verifiable if one only opens the eyes and sees rightly:

'Thou seest not in the creation

of the All-merciful any imperfection.

Return thy gaze; seest thou any fissure?

Then return thy gaze again, and again,

and thy gaze comes back to thee dazzled, aweary.' (Surah 67:3-4)³¹

'Surely God shall not wrong so much as the weight of an ant' (Surah 4:40)

According to the Koran the man is God's successor, representative (*ḥalīfa*) and servant (*'abd*), and completes the creation by turning to God in faith thankfully, submitting himself to God's will and following His guidance.³² The evil appears when the man (as an individual) turns away from God (there is no original sin in Islam, Adam is forgiven after he repents and God promises him the guidance).³³ Satan appears as the one who opposes God and misleads people; however, it is still the humans who remain responsible for their actions and Satan is not the evil itself in person.³⁴ The autonomous human beings bear responsibility for the evil³⁵ and God is omnipotent – this paradox is showed in the following verses: *'Say: 'Everything is from God.' How is it with this people? They scarcely understand any tiding. Whatever good visits thee, it is of God; whatever evil visits thee is of thyself.'* (Surah 4:78b -79) God's justness is taught very vehemently in the Koran: *'Surely God shall not wring so much as the weight of an ant.'* (Surah 4:40)³⁶ However, suffering is also presented as a test from God or it serves educational purposes³⁷: *'We try you with evil and good for testing.'* (Surah

²⁷ KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 96.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 96, p. 14.

³¹ Koran quotations: <http://en.noblequran.org/quran>

³² "As there is no original sin, there is no need for atonement in Islam," writes A. Aslan. Cf. A. ASLAN: *Sündenfall, Böses und Leiden im Islam*, in: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 46; A. MIDDELBECK-VARWICK: *Die Grenze zwischen Gott und Mensch*, p. 205

³³ R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 131.; it is possible to assume that there are some places in the Koran where evil is understood rather demonically or as bad Omen (see Surah 113), but the moral understanding of evil is predominant. See R. SCHULZE, p. 136.

³⁴ Iblis is an evil acting angel. Cf. R. SCHULZE, *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 141; it is possible to assume that there are some places in the Koran where evil is understood rather demonically or as bad Omen (see Surah 113), but the moral understanding of evil is predominant. Cf. R. SCHULZE, p. 136.

³⁵ Cf. T. GÖRGÜN: *Leid als Teil der Welt und des Lebens. Gibt es ein Theodizeeproblem aus islamischer Perspektive?*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 219f.

³⁶ Cf. N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 95

³⁷ Cf. Ibid., p. 15.

21:35) *'We tried them with good things and evil, that haply they should return.'*(Surah 7:168) The trials and their endurance belong to the life of believers. In Koran there is no place for lamentations or questioning God: *'He shall not be questioned as to what He does, but they shall be questioned.'* (Surah 21:23)³⁸ The prophet is even explicitly warned not to follow the example of Jonah: *'So wait patiently for the Judgment of your Lord, and be not like the owner of the Fish (like Jonah). He had cried out (to his Lord) while he was in deep sorrow.'* (Surah 68:48) Even concerning good news, when Zacharias or Mary receive the message of getting a child and ask God about its possibility, God answers their doubting questions: *'Thus Allah does what He wills '* and *'Just like this, Allah creates what He wills.'* (Surah 3: 40 and 47)³⁹ God is omnipotent and nothing is outside His control. Life is a test and believers may sometimes suffer the most, but at the end – in this or in the afterlife - sufferings will be compensated, the good will be rewarded and the evil judged. *'To Him is the return of all of you. The Promise of Allah is true. Surely He begins the creation in the first instant. Then those who believe (who wish to reach Allah before death) and do improving deeds (that purify the souls' hearts) are returned to Him again, that He may reward them with justice. And as for those who disbelieve, for them there will be a drink of hot water and painful torment because they disbelieved.'* (Surah 10:4)⁴⁰

First of all, the submission to God is emphasised:

*,Yet give thou good tidings unto the patient
Who, when they are visited by an affliction,
Say, 'Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return';
Upon those rest blessings and mercy
From their Lord, and those – they are the truly guided.'* (Surah 2:155f)⁴¹

According to a **hadith**⁴², even the angels Michael and Gabriel had a different opinion concerning where evil comes from: from God or from the human soul. Finally, angel Israfil decided, saying that both good and evil come from God. Mohammed agreed adding: If God wanted that Satan did not revolt, He would not have created him.⁴³

There is a story in the **Koran** which is sometimes called the legend of theodicy. It follows the pattern already preformed before the advent of Islam in Jewish and Eastern Christian literature: a pious protagonist – a hermit in the Christian legend and Rabbi Akiba in the midrash – experiences three successive, obvious injustices that transpire at the end of the story as God's mercy.⁴⁴ In the Koranic version (Surah 18: 66-82) Moses asks a servant of God whether he can follow him in order to become acquainted with the correct path. The servant introduces one condition, namely that Moses must not ask for explanations in case he does not understand something, but he has to be patient. Three

³⁸ Cf. also H. ZIRKER: *Theodizee und Theodizeeabwehr in Koran und Umgebung...*, in: *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident* (U. TWORUSCHKA Hrsg.), p. 410f; Koran citation: N. KERMANI, p. 95.

³⁹ Cf. H. ZIRKER: *Theodizee und Theodizeeabwehr in Koran und Umgebung...*, in: *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident*, p. 414.

⁴⁰ Koran citation: <http://en.noblequran.org/quran/>; Cf. M. AMINRAZAVI: *God, creation, and the human person in Islam*; in: *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions* (Ed. P. KOSLOWSKI), p. 99.

⁴¹ N. KERMANI, p. 15.

⁴² The hadiths are traditions about the acts and sayings of Muhammad. Cf. R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 149.

⁴³ R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 149.

⁴⁴ N. KERMANI, p. 17.

times, however, Moses breaks his promise: when the servant makes a ship capsize, when he strikes an innocent boy dead, and when he saves the citizens of a town even though they showed miserliness before. Moses asks the servant of God for the reasons for his actions, and so - because of his impatience - he cannot follow the servant any more. However, he gives him the explanation, showing that all he did was to avoid something worse happening (for example the boy was killed in order not to impose insolence and unbelief on his parents and God will provide the parents a better child). The story wants to illustrate that there is a difference between what humans see and the meaning that God bestows upon events. What looks like injustice, may in fact be God's mercy and wisdom. There is a limitation of human understanding: 'And how can you have patience for what you do not encompass in knowledge as it is not given to you?' (Surah 18:68)⁴⁵ The question of theodicy is rather senseless.

Even if Job is mentioned in the Koran, there is no place for his revolt. Navid Kermani notes that the absence of lament can be partially due to the specific textuality of the Koran, which is written as a direct speech of God to one person at a specific moment of history.⁴⁶ However, for the Islamic theologians the claim of the Koran concerning God's justice and the harmony of the world was not at all so obvious, and the problem of theodicy emerged.⁴⁷ Some theologians got even so far that they rejected the goodness of God: Dshahm ibn Safwân (killed in 745, the founder of the theological-rationalist school of Dshahmiyya) took his companions to leprosy and other diseases saying: 'Look at here, such things does the most Merciful of merciful.'⁴⁸

In the dialectical Islamic theology of the Middle Ages, we find two schools of theology that provided different answers on the problem of theodicy: the Mu'tazilites on the one hand, who emphasised the human free will and the justice of God; and the Ash'arites on the other hand, who spoke about predestination and focused on the omnipotence of God. The Mu'tazilite school originated in the 8th century with its centre in Basra (the second centre was established in the 9th century in Baghdad). By espousing the doctrine of free will they formed a part of the broad, albeit scarcely coherent movement of *Qadariyya*. They were known together as the 'party of Justice' due to their emphasis on the justice of God and the human free will in order to explain evil.⁴⁹ According to al-'Allāf (d. 840) God admits the evil actions of man, but He is not their author, and the man is responsible even for the involuntary consequences resulting from his actions.⁵⁰ 'Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 1024) spoke about the objective validity and recognisability of good and evil. None of them is determined merely by divine command, but they are essential features of things applying to God as well as to man.⁵¹ Illness and distresses could be seen as motivations to remember the obligations given by God. The innocent

⁴⁵ Cf. N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 17; Cf. H. ZIRKER: *Theodizee und Theodizeeabwehr in Koran und Umgebung...*, in: *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident*, p. 415f.; citation from Koran: <http://en.noblequran.org/quran/>

⁴⁶ N. KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils in der Welt*, in I. U. DALFERTH, K. LEHMANN, N. KERMANI: *Das Böse. Drei Annäherungen*. Herder, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Cf. N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 130.

⁴⁸ N. KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils in der Welt*, in I. U. DALFERTH, K. LEHMANN, N. KERMANI: *Das Böse. Drei Annäherungen*, p. 97.

⁴⁹ N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 96; E. L. ORMSBY, p. 20.

⁵⁰ S. SCHREINER: *Der Prophet Ayyub und das Theodizee-Problem im Islam*, in: *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit?* (RENZ, A. et al., Hrsg.), p. 53.

⁵¹ E. L. ORMSBY, p. 235, 234.

sufferers will be recompensated.⁵² As a reaction on the problematical rationalist optimism of the mu'tazilite theology, in the 10th century al-Ashari grounded the Ash'areite school. He returned to the emphasis of the divine omnipotence.⁵³ God is responsible for all the happening. In which way God's justice manifests, is for the human reason not comprehensible. Al-Ashari emphasised that the moral value judgements are not created by man, but by God. It is God's will what defines good and bad – there is no such thing as good or evil beyond what the divine law reveals as such.⁵⁴ All the deeds of people – including their moral quality – are created by God. The human acts are already preordained, but one has to 'acquire' (*kasaba*) these actions in the act of self-responsibility.⁵⁵ In Al-Ghazali's theology some mu'tazilite and sufistic elements got integrated into the Ash'arite orthodoxy (see later). The Mu'tazilite view persisted in Islam only in Shiite theology. In Sunni orthodoxy a middle ground was established between human freedom and divine omnipotence where all power is assigned to God, yet nonetheless all guilt to humans. The Sunni orthodoxy accepted the Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb* (acquisition of preordained actions).⁵⁶ One should acknowledge God's omnipotence, avoid evil and refrain from further questions that no human mind can perceive.⁵⁷

Another field where the evil was thought of, was the **Arabic-Islamic Philosophy**. Al-Farabi (d. 950) states that the good is the perfection of the being and the evil is an absence of this perfection (an argument known from the Greek philosophy and later from the Christian scholastic).⁵⁸ Avicenna (and the Jewish Maimonides too) drew a line between human and divine logic.⁵⁹ Avicenna wrote: *'For were it not the case that this world is compounded so as to give rise to goods and ills and to promote both sound and unsound actions in its denizens, the world's order would be imperfect and incomplete.'*⁶⁰ According to Avicenna evil is a deficit concerning the perfection and not something absolute.⁶¹ Averroës (d. 1198) emphasizes that God *'is not just in the same way as man is just.'*⁶² He criticized the Ash'arite view, as he emphasised that good and evil exist by themselves and are not only arbitrary. God created both evil and good, but good was created for itself and evil only for the good.⁶³ Only through the good can the evil be comprehended. *'In this way His creation of evil would be quite just. To illustrate: fire has been made because of its necessity for the existence of things, and without it they could not have existed at all. It also destroys things by its very nature. But if you think*

⁵² Cf. A. MIDDELBECK-VARWICK: *Die Grenze zwischen Gott und Mensch*, p. 301f.

⁵³ N. KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils in der Welt*, in I. U. DALFERTH, K. LEHMANN, N. KERMANI: *Das Böse. Drei Annäherungen*. Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau 2011, p. 100.

⁵⁴ R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 162.; A. ASLAN: *Sündenfall, Böses und Leiden im Islam*, in *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen* (P. KOSLOWKI Hrsg.), p. 49.; ORMSBY, p. 155.

⁵⁵ According to the Shiite modern theologian Morteza Motahhari (murdered in 1979) such predestination would absolve the sinner from guilt. Cf. KERMANI, p. 84; 96. REINHARD SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 163.; Cf. S. SCHREINER: *Der Prophet Ayyub und das Theodizee-Problem im Islam*, in *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit?*, p. 55.

⁵⁶ N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 96.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95

⁵⁸ R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 167.

⁵⁹ N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 85.

⁶⁰ IBN SINA: *Risāla fī l-arzāq*, cited in N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 86.

⁶¹ R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 169.

⁶² AVERROËS: *Philosophie und Theologie*, 124; cited by N. KERMANI (*Ibid.*), p. 86.

⁶³ R. SCHULZE (*Ibid.*), p. 171.

of the destruction and evil which it causes, and compare it to the advantages which we derive out of it, you will find that its existence is better than non-existence, that is, good.⁶⁴

According to the mystical branch of Islam, the Sufism, creation is an act of love, and God's involvement with creation is love affair. To understand the real reason for creation, one has to experience the inner truth of Islam that is not possible without inner cleansing and catharsis of the self.⁶⁵ The Sufis see the man as the image of God, and the final goal of the Sufi path is the annihilation of the ego (*fana'*) and subsistence (*baqa'*) within God. The human ego (the demanding soul) is the source of evil and to avoid it, the human soul should be tamed and the human heart tied to God.⁶⁶ The Sufi ethos includes the renunciation of all retribution, and the model for such ethos is Jesus. Early Islamic asceticism was sometimes also described as 'following the way of Christ.'⁶⁷ Despite the distrust in orthodox quarters, within the mystical literature we can find the topos of quarrelling with God (*taẓallum 'alā r-rabb*). It was especially widespread among the poets of the Turkish Bektashi order. The Anatolian mystic and poet Yunus Emre (d.c. 1321) criticized the Sirat bridge, which all the dead had to cross even though it is finer than a hair, and he disapproved of the scales with which God weighs up the good and bad deeds of humans: 'A bridge, Yunus said, is built for people to cross it, not to fall down; scales are fit for a grocer, but not for a God.'⁶⁸ The Persian mystic and poet Attar's *Book of Suffering* is a strong example of a heretical, with God quarrelling piety, adopting motives also from earlier mystics (see later).

I would like to mention the special role of **suffering and martyrdom in the Shia Islam**. In the folksy Shia Islam we can find the belief that sufferings have something similar like a redemptive power, namely the sufferings of the Holy Family, the Imams and their faithful followers.⁶⁹ Especially the sixth Imam, Ḥusayn's suffering and martyrdom on Kerbalā is considered to have huge, even cosmic significance. The place Kerbalā will also be the place of the final reckoning. 'The blood of the elect of God was shed in this realm, it may be said therefore that its soil was mixed with the blood of God.[...]The Ka'bah is the house of God, but this [Karbālā] is the source of divine lights.'⁷⁰ According to the Shī'ī piety, Ḥusayn's voluntary and unconditional acceptance of suffering and martyrdom for the love of God and the true preservation of His religion, as well as the sufferings of the other imāms and the Holy Family are regarded as a source of redemption for the community of the faithful (especially through intercessions from the side of the Holy Family and the imāms, and through participating of their followers in their struggle through compassion, doing good to the poor, weeping, poetry⁷¹ and by sharing their suffering).⁷² Ḥusayn's martyrdom is also a source of condemnation and judgement for the evil. The twelfth Imam, Mahdī will be the final avenger, and the final reckoning of men will be

⁶⁴ AVERROËS: *Philosophie und Theologie*, 124; cited by N. KERMANI (Ibid.), p. 18.

⁶⁵ M. AMINRAZAVI: *God, creation, and the human person in Islam*, in *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions*, p. 104.

⁶⁶ Cf. R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 180f.

⁶⁷ N. KERMANI (Ibid.), p. 150. Kermani writes further: 'According to Shiite tradition, the first imam of the Shia, Imam Ali (murdered 661), stated that the exemplary believers were those who command the world to »follow the way of Christ.«

⁶⁸ N. KERMANI (Ibid.), p. 131.

⁶⁹ Redemption used in the broad sense of healing of existence or fulfilment of human life. M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 23; A. ASLAN: *Sündenfall, Böses und Leiden im Islam*, in *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 48.

⁷⁰ 'The Shrine of Martyrs', by Fayiz Işfahānī, cited in M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 250.

⁷¹ Cf. *taẓīyah* ritual, M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p.148f.

⁷² M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 197; Cf. p. 141; 147.

conducted by Ḥusayn.⁷³ According to the Shī'ī piety, Fatima (the daughter of the Prophet and the mother of Ḥusayn) is the mistress of the House of Sorrows in paradise, lamenting her slain son, until the day of final vengeance, final reckoning and the Day of Resurrection, when she will have an intercessory role.⁷⁴ The whole world itself is a House of Sorrows.⁷⁵ Suffering is a test of faith of the pious and a means of purification of heart, and it has its merit with God. There is a strong waiting of eschatological type for the justice on earth.⁷⁶ Concerning the modern understanding, Mahmoud Ayoub cites the words of an 'ālim: '*Husayn died in protest against the hunger of the hungry, the poverty of the poor and the oppression of the oppressed.*'⁷⁷

To conclude, we can find the following main and interrelated understandings of suffering:

1. Suffering as testing: The whole life is a test of faithfulness and steadiness, so that at the end one can be worthy of the joys of paradise. According to Islam everyone will be tested and it is often the believers who suffer the most. As far as one can, the suffering should be solved but when it is not possible, one should accept his given destiny and turn to God with trust (*tawakkal ala Allah*).⁷⁸ According to a hadith the prophet recommended to a Bedouin: 'Tie your camel first, then put your trust in Allah.'⁷⁹ The word Islam itself means submission and peace. As hadiths demonstrate, the man of faith on this Earth will be visited with suffering and calamity in accordance with the strength and durability of his faith, but the rewards for him will be multiplied. '*For, if God loves a people, He visits them with afflictions.*'⁸⁰

2. Suffering as punishment and price of the human freedom: The man himself is responsible for the evil, but at the same time God is omnipotent and has everything in control. God, who is just and merciful, punishes the sins, but this punishment is also an appeal for man's conversion.⁸¹ If the human is responsible for all evil, the natural evil remains unexplained, because in Islam the personal responsibility is emphasised and the idea of sin as supra-individual power and structural reality is unknown (in Koran human guilt does not have those ruinous consequences as in Genesis).⁸² The natural happenings can serve as instruments for God's testing.⁸³ According to the modern Shia scholar at-Tabataba'i (d. 1980) the good is the goal of God's creation, the evil is exclusively human-created (as missing the goal of the world), and the natural happenings themselves are considered neutrally.⁸⁴

⁷³ M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 229.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48, p. 191.

⁷⁵ *Cf. Ibid.*, p. 145.

⁷⁶ N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 19.

⁷⁷ Redemption used in the broad sense of healing of existence or fulfilment of human life. M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 233.

⁷⁸ *Cf. A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 209; A. ASLAN: *Sündenfall, Böses und Leiden im Islam*, in: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 59 – 60.

⁷⁹ A. ASLAN (*Ibid.*), p. 60.

⁸⁰ M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 25 – 26.

⁸¹ *Cf. A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 206

⁸² H. ZIRKER: *Theodizee und Theodizeeabwehr in Koran und Umgebung...*, in: *Gottes ist der Orient, Gottes ist der Okzident*, p. 417; A. MIDDELBECK-VARWICK: *Die Grenze zwischen Gott und Mensch*, p. 320.

⁸³ A. ASLAN (*Ibid.*), p. 61.

⁸⁴ R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*. In: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 195.

3. Suffering can be sometimes viewed as a sign of spiritual growth and perfection. According to a hadith the prophets suffer the most, followed by believers and the others.⁸⁵ In Sufism inner cleansing and catharsis is needed to experience the inner truth of Islam.⁸⁶ Some Sufis underwent also a voluntary suffering (*chila*) in order to achieve spiritual experiences.⁸⁷

4. According to a Shīa piety, remembering and sharing the sufferings of the imāms (especially remembering Ḥusayn) is a task and sign of the community of faithful. At the end of the time, this community will be redeemed.

5. God will compensate the sufferings either in this or in the afterlife. The trust in God gives patience to endure suffering. Suffering in this world can relieve from the sufferings in the afterlife. The evil-doers will be punished at the end and the innocent sufferers rewarded. The question of 'Why?' is rather a sign of distrust in God.⁸⁸

From the practical point of view, one has to solve and relieve suffering as long as it is possible but then should willingly submit himself to the will of God, even if it is not understandable for him. Patience (*ṣabr*), satisfaction (*riḍā'*) and first of all trust (*tawakkul*) in the merciful God are the basic attitudes in Islamic spirituality in suffering and distress.⁸⁹ Beyond a type of determinism, doing good and compassion have still huge significance.⁹⁰ There is not much place for rebellion and laments to God in the spirituality; however, we can find exceptions especially in the Islamic mysticism and poetics.

I have chosen two medieval authors, an orthodox theologian and a mystical poet (through the interpretation of a recent Muslim author), to demonstrate two very different approaches to the question of suffering inside Islamic spirituality.

⁸⁵ A. ASLAN: *Sündenfall, Böses und Leiden im Islam, in Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 55.

⁸⁶ M. AMINRAZAVI: *God, creation, and the human person in Islam; in The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions*, p. 104.

⁸⁷ A. ASLAN (Ibid.); p. 56.

⁸⁸ Cf. M. AMINRAZAVI (Ibid.), p. 102; A. MIDDELBECK-VARWICK: *Die Grenze zwischen Gott und Mensch*, p. 222; p. 228; p. 231.

⁸⁹ N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 171.

⁹⁰ Cf. N. KERMANI (Ibid.), p. 3, 7.

In Possibility No Better World – al-Ghazālī

*'Do not doubt in any way that
God is the most compassionate of the compassionate.'*⁹¹

Through the mystic and theologian al- Ghazali, the Mu'tazilite intention was continued, albeit in a gentler form, in Ash'arism. He rehabilitated rationalism and integrated Sufism into the Ash'arite orthodoxy, but set limits for both elements through the primacy of divine providence.⁹² First of all, I would like to characterize some Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite emphases in order to see the connections to al-Ghazali.

The Mu'tazilite school emphasised God's justice, and as a consequence some of its theologians accepted the doctrine of the optimum: God is in some way obliged to provide 'the optimum' (*al-aṣḥāḥ* - the most salutary) for His creatures. God could not have done anything without wise intentions and all His actions served the well-being of every single human being. According to some mu'tazilite theologians evil can be beneficial: the pain remembers the man on the most important and on the good. 'Umar az-Zamakhshari (d. 1144) distinguishes between good and evil suffering.⁹³ According to al-Jahiz (d. 869) evil has sense insofar, as the mixing of good and evil gives for the humans the possibility of distinction. Without this mixing of good and evil the world would not have meaning: there would be neither justice nor injustice, neither joy, nor hope or despair.⁹⁴ God's justice is however very much emphasized in the Mu'tazilite school and has almost the same importance as God's absolute oneness (*tawhid*). All His actions are just and contain no evil (Ibn 'Abbad, d. 995).⁹⁵

Al-Ash'ari (d. 935/6) himself came from a mu'tazilite tradition, with which he broke.⁹⁶ His disagreements over the doctrine of the optimum are often said to have precipitated the break. According to a story, al-Ash'ari questioned his master as to whether God had done 'the optimum' in the case of three individuals: a believer, an unbeliever and a child, all of whom died and were, respectively, rewarded, punished and 'neither rewarded, nor punished.' What if the child would ask God: 'O Lord, if only you had let me live, it would have been better (*aṣḥāḥ*), for then I would have entered the paradise?' Al-Ash'ari's master replied that God would say to the child: 'I knew that if you had lived, you would have become a sinner and then entered hell.' But then, countered al-Ash'ari, the unbeliever in the hell would exclaim: 'O Lord! Why did you not kill me as a child, too, so that I would not sin and then enter hell?' At this al-Ash'ari's master was left speechless.⁹⁷

Al-Ash'ari and his followers emphasized God's omnipotence, who is the author of good as well as evil. There is even no such thing as good or evil beyond what the divine law reveals as such. 'What He wills, is; what He does not will, is not.'⁹⁸ All things, from human acts to natural events, are direct results of the divine decree. (However, the man has to 'acquire' his preordained acts; contrary to the

⁹¹ AL-GHAZALI: *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, cited by E. L. ORMSBY (Ibid.), p. 258.

⁹² N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 89.

⁹³ Cf. R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 154.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 156.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 162.

⁹⁷ The narration cited according to ORMSBY (Ibid.), p. 23.

⁹⁸ AL-ASH'ARI: *al-Ibānah*, cited by ORMSBY, p. 24.

view of the severe predestinarianism of the Mujbirah school). God's decree is to be accepted without question.⁹⁹

During the period roughly from the 9th to the 11th century, various attempts to resolve the problem of theodicy stood as rival, competing solutions. In the 11th and 12th century, however, the Ash'arite school gained prominence, partly thanks to al-Ghazali.¹⁰⁰ The Ash'arite emphasis on divine omnipotence, far from resolving the problem of theodicy, gave rise to further difficulties. These difficulties came to light in the writings of al-Ghazali.

Abū Ḥāmid al- Ghazālī was born in 1058 and died in 1111 in Ṭūs, in the Iranian province of Khurāsān. He underwent a severe spiritual crisis and a period of radical scepticism. He investigated the dialectical theology, Isma'ili authoritarian teaching, philosophy and Sufi mysticism. His quest for a basis of certain knowledge ended up with his conviction that Sufism offered the only satisfactory approach. In his huge work *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* he attempted to order the religious sciences under the aegis of Sufi mysticism. In several passages of his later Sufi works, he raised the question of theodicy in a rather novel form: he offered a solution that combined many aspects of the Ash'arite, the Mu'tazilite and the philosophical approaches, casting them into a single distinctive formulation.¹⁰¹ He borrowed from a variety of sources, but ultimately his version of theodicy is a logical outgrowth of orthodox Ash'arite doctrine. It is not a systematic theodicy.¹⁰²

Al-Ghazali subscribed to the Ash'arite emphasis on the divine omnipotence and the contingency of all events, but also believed that he could rationally prove God's justice. He tried to prove the perfection of the world and the necessary rightfulness of everything existent without limiting God's power or freedom.¹⁰³ Al-Ghazali's position could be viewed as a middle course between two extremes: on the one hand, the Mu'tazilite insistence on the requisite rightness and justice of things as they are; and, on the other hand, the Ash'arite insistence on voluntarism, the sovereign and ungovernable will of God.¹⁰⁴ The Mu'tazilite answers on innocent suffering proved to be unsatisfying (like the problem of suffering of children that was seen as a sign and admonition for the adults and was believed to be recompensated in the world after). On the other side, the strict Ash'aritic position was too harsh and inadequate, saying that God afflicts individuals just simply because He wills to afflict them and one should not ask why. Al-Ghazali asks himself: *'Now God is able to ward off every misfortune and to avert all poverty and grief and to remove every sickness and every injury. But the world overflows with sicknesses, tribulations, and calamities. He is able to remove all of them and yet, He leaves His servants in travail to disasters and misfortunes.'*¹⁰⁵

It appears first in the discussion of the 'trust in God' (*tawakkul*) in the fourth part of the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* where al-Ghazali declares: *'There is not in possibility anything whatever more excellent, more complete, or more perfect than it is.'* One should mark that al-Ghazali's aim is not a systematic or reasoned proof of theodicy, but it is an exhortation to a specific stage on the Sufi path.

⁹⁹ ORMSBY (Ibid.), p. 24, 155.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 29-31.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 259.

¹⁰³ N. KERMANI, p. 88.

¹⁰⁴ E. L. ORMSBY, p. 220.

¹⁰⁵ AL-GHAZALI: *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* ; cited by E. L. ORMSBY, p. 252.

I am citing al-Ghazali's argument from his work *Iḥyā'*:

'Everything which God apportions to man, such as sustenance, life-span, pleasure and pain, capacity and incapacity, belief and disbelief, obedience and sin, is all of it sheer justice, with no injustice in it; and pure right, with no wrong in it.

Indeed, it is according to the necessarily right order, in accord with what must be and as it must be and in the measure in which it must be; and there is not in possibility anything whatever more excellent, more perfect, and more complete than it.

*For if there were and He had withheld it, having power to create it but not deigning to do so, this would be miserliness contrary to the divine generosity and injustice contrary to the divine justice. But if He were not able, it would be incapability contrary to divinity.'*¹⁰⁶

As we see, the belief in God's justice, goodness and power form the basis for al-Ghazali's argument about the most excellent world in possibility. If God has withheld a better world which He could have created, He is miserly, but this is in contradiction to His generosity and justice. On the other hand, if He could not have created a better world, He is somehow deficient in power.¹⁰⁷ The problem of the nature and origin of evil plays a lesser role by al-Ghazali. What is very much at issue is the question of whether God is capable of creating another and better world. One should note that al-Ghazali does not speak here about *the* most perfect world, but the most perfect world *in possibility*, which may mean that God has created the best possible provisions for the existence (a similar view as that of the Christian Scholastics).¹⁰⁸

The question of a better possible world arises because of our awareness of the evils of existence. Al-Ghazali continues trying to give answer to the reality of obvious imperfections. According to him, there is a correlation between perfection and imperfection.¹⁰⁹ Imperfections are even necessary for the sake of the good things: *'For were it not for night, the value of day would be unknown. Were it not for illness, the healthy would not enjoy health.'* *'As long as the imperfect is not created, the perfect will remain unknown. If beasts had not been created, the dignity of man would not be manifest. The perfect and the imperfect are correlated. Divine generosity and wisdom require the simultaneous creation of the perfect and the imperfect.'*¹¹⁰ The Sufi 'Ayn al-Quḍāh al-Hamadhānī (d. 1131) remarked in this regard: *'Muḥammad cannot be without Iblīs. Virtue without vice, disbelief without belief. So with all the contraries: »Things are explicable through their contraries.«'*

There could be huge objections to this statement about the correlation of good and evil. Why is one suffering and the other enjoying happiness? The answer, which al-Ghazali gives, and perhaps the only possible answer, is the mystery and inscrutability of predestination:¹¹¹ *'The gist is that good and evil are foreordained. What is foreordained comes necessarily to be after a prior act of divine volition. No one can rebel against God's judgement; no one can appeal His decree and command.'*¹¹² The guaranty of al-Ghazali's theodicy is the unassailable fact of divine predestination. It is this which

¹⁰⁶ AL-GHAZALI: *Iḥyā'*; cited by E. L. ORMSBY (Ibid.), p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ ORMSBY, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸ R. SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition*, in: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*, p. 176.

¹⁰⁹ ORMSBY, p. 64.

¹¹⁰ AL-GHAZALI: *Iḥyā'*, cited by ORMSBY, p. 40.

¹¹¹ E. L. ORMSBY, p. 69.

¹¹² AL-GHAZALI: *Iḥyā'*, cited by ORMSBY, p. 41.

permits the seeker after trust in God any certainty. One should note that in this very book of the *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazali also presents arguments in an attempt to reconcile the strict predestination with some highly qualified notion of free will.¹¹³

We have to note that the passage of this argumentation is part of an exhortation to the trust in God. It seems, the dissatisfaction with things as they are could form an obstacle to the trust in God.¹¹⁴ As another Islamic theologian says, the aspirant to *tawakkul* should crave not for lordship, but to be *'like an infant who knows no refuge other than his mother's breast.'*¹¹⁵ The world is to be viewed not from a personal perspective, but 'from above', without reference to the self.¹¹⁶

The passage about the excellence of the world is closely related to a work (*Qūt al-qulūb*) by Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996) which was one of the Sufi sources of al-Ghazali in composing the *Iḥyā'*.¹¹⁷ In both works the perfect rightness of the actual is emphasized. Thus, whereas al-Makki concentrates on the inability of the human mind to perceive this, al-Ghazali forces the issue. He affirms the impossibility of a more excellent state-of- affairs.¹¹⁸

The Greek philosopher Plato stated in his work *Timaeus* that *'the work of the supremely good' cannot 'be anything but that which is best.'*¹¹⁹ In Galen's compendium of Plato's *Timaeus*, which was translated into Arabic, we find a very similar formulation to al-Ghazali's statement: *'It is not possible that (the world) be in any condition more excellent than that in which it is.'* The compendium continues: *'The reason for the creation of the world is God's generosity...'* It can be assumed that such a passage of *Timaeus* stood as an important source for al-Ghazali's argumentation. Ormsby remarks that these philosophical influences of al-Ghazali's thinking were largely ignored by his defenders.¹²⁰

In *al-Imlā' fī mushkilāt al-Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazali presents a brief defence of the controversial passage in the *Iḥyā'*. He makes some modifications in his statement: *'There is not in possibility (anything) more wonderful (abda') than the form (ṣūrah) of this world.'*¹²¹ In this work Al-Ghazali stresses that it is the divine wisdom which dictates the things to be as good as possible and not some necessity to which God is subject.¹²² The wisdom demands the simultaneous creation of perfect and imperfect, they are both necessary. It is the sign of wisdom that the perfect and imperfect coexist. The wisdom in God's creation is unimpeachable. All the creation *'subsists in God, exists through His power, continues through His knowledge...and indicates His far-reaching wisdom. There is nothing more perfect than*

¹¹³ As Ormsby remarks, predestination was one of the most controversial questions in Islamic theology from the earliest period. A saying from ibn Yasār (d. 720): *'[Free will and predestination] are two deep valleys where people stray without ever reaching botám. Act therefore like someone who knows that only his own acts can still save him; and trust in God like someone who knows that only that will strike him which was meant for him.'* E. L. ORMSBY (Ibid.), p. 71.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

¹¹⁵ AL-QUSHAYRI: *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyah*; cited by E. L. ORMSBY, p. 43.

¹¹⁶ ORMSBY, p. 43.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 61

¹¹⁹ Cited by ORMSBY, p. 83.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 75.

¹²² Ibid., p. 77.

*its temporal creation except His eternity, nor (more perfect) than its administration except for His absolute rule...*¹²³

Besides God's wisdom, al-Ghazali emphasizes also God's will. The radical contingency of things is a crucial principle in the Ghazalian theodicy.¹²⁴ In his treatise on the divine names he states: '*All the events that occur in the world, the evil and the good, the helpful and the harmful, are not outside the divine volition, but rather are willed by God.*' '*Everything that enters into existence enters only by necessity. It is necessary that it exist, even if it is not necessary per se, but rather necessary by the eternal decree, against which no one can rebel.*'¹²⁵ Both the perfect and imperfect are necessary for God wills them, and all contributes to the admirable order of the world. The imperfect serves not only to lead us to knowledge and stand as a 'ransom' for the perfect, but is also willed as it is.¹²⁶ Even the very imperfections of the world – disease, deficiency, vice – contribute to the surpassing excellence of the world.¹²⁷ However, one should not simply accept the evil, because it would be like to commit it. Even though they are both willed, they have a different value – whereas the evil is hated, the good is endorsed by God.¹²⁸

As the later Ḥanbalite theologian Ibn Taymīyah (d. 1328) stated, the Ash'arites affirmed God's '*will without wisdom, and volition without mercy, love, and approval.*'¹²⁹ Al-Ghazali's emphasis on the role of wisdom can be seen as an attempt to modify or at least rationalize the strict Ash'arite doctrine of God's sovereign unaccountability. For al-Ghazali, the divine wisdom pervades each creature.¹³⁰ The divine wisdom is the ultimate justification for things as they are.¹³¹ The perfect rightness of the actual extends not only to the natural world, but to the world of human affairs too. Everything is a result of God's decree, predestination, wisdom and will. The human actions are from God in one sense and from man in another.¹³²

Al-Ghazali refuses the Mu'tazilite belief in the autonomy of the human intellect to discern good and evil, unaided by the directives of the divine law. For him, as for Ash'arism generally, good and evil have no object validity. Good is good because God has established it.¹³³ In his point of view, as for Ash'arites generally, God possesses a grace that He uses when and as He wills, and this grace is unlimited. God is free not merely to withhold grace, but even to misguide (cf. Koran). No attempt is undertaken to absolve God from responsibility. Al-Ghazali's view of the imperfect as a ransom for the perfect differs from the Mu'tazilite view, according to which God intends only benefit for all the individuals. Al-Ghazali's 'most wonderful' is to be understood rather in cosmic terms.¹³⁴ He emphasises God's justice and wisdom, but he refuses the Mu'tazilite principle about the analogy between this world and the transcendent: Nothing exists, '*...except what is created by God's action*

¹²³ AL-GHAZALI: *al-Imlā*, cited by E. L. ORMSBY, p. 80.

¹²⁴ ORMSBY, p. 260.

¹²⁵ AL-GHAZALI: *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*; cited by ORMSBY, p. 196.

¹²⁶ ORMSBY, p. 203

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹²⁸ AL-GHAZZALI/GRAMLICH: *Lehre*; cited in: SCHULZE: *Das Böse in der islamischen Tradition, in Das Böse in den Weltreligionen*; p. 174; 175.

¹²⁹ Cited by ORMSBY, p. 47.

¹³⁰ Cf. ORMSBY, p. 47f.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 52-53.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

*and emanates from His justice in an existence that is most excellent, most perfect, most complete, and most just, for God is wise in His acts, just in His judgements. God's justice is not to be compared with man's.*¹³⁵

Al-Ghazali tries to answer the reality of suffering in several ways. Suffering could be like a prescribed cure we must endure for our ultimate good. The sufferer may console himself with the thought that there are worse conditions than his situation. Evil may contain or conceal hidden good and secret blessings. Based on Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazali argues that God decrees the good *per se*, the evil only *per accidens* (for the good that it contains). The evil that God wills is always for the sake of some ultimate and overriding good.¹³⁶ All these explanations are basically homiletic, in order to convince people to trust and abandon themselves to God.

For al-Ghazali too, all human explanations are provisional, and one should believe in God's goodness. The divine mercy is bound up with 'God's secret', the mystery of predestination. *'Never doubt that He is the most merciful of the merciful, or that His mercy takes precedence over His anger, and never doubt that whoever would pursue evil for the sake of evil and not for the sake of good is unworthy of being called merciful; for in all this lies a mystery whose divulgence the law forbids. Be content with prayer, and do not demand for it to be divulged. You have been instructed through signs and directions whether you belong to His people.'* Reflect! ...for I deem you one endowed with insight into God's secret of predestination¹³⁷

Some critical remarks

'There is not in possibility anything more wonderful than what is', i.e., it is impossible that there exists anything more wonderful than what is¹³⁸ – this statement of Al-Ghazali provoked a lot of controversy. If nothing in possibility is 'more wonderful' or more perfect than what actually exists here and now, then God's omnipotence seems to be severely compromised. Al-Ghazali himself affirmed in several other works the orthodox doctrine that God's power is limitless.¹³⁹ Is God not able to create world after world, each more wonderful, ad infinitum?¹⁴⁰ One side of the problem is the definition of divine omnipotence, a subject of discussion among Muslim theologians from an early period (e.g. the Mu'tazilite question concerning actions contrary to God's 'nature', or the question of actions with intrinsic contradiction or impossibility).¹⁴¹ As Ormsby notes, one should understand what impossibility means. The Alexandrian scholar Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 1284) says that impossibility stands in no relation whatever to existence and should not be treated as though it could exist in some sense. The impossible is that which by its very nature can neither be imagined nor performed. Divine power stands in no nexus with the impossible. Ibn al-Munayyir criticizes al-Ghazali's statement about the most perfect world, because possibilities are limitless and in the realm of possibility the perfections themselves have no limits (contrary to the realm of actual existence). To suppose a most perfect, above which there is nothing more perfect, is to render finite what is infinite, and this is

¹³⁵ AL-GHAZALI: *Iḥyā'*; cited by ORMSBY, p. 247.

¹³⁶ ORMSBY, p. 251-257.

¹³⁷ AL-GHAZALI: *Al-Maqṣad al-asnā*; cited by KERMANI (Ibid.), p. 90 and ORMSBY, p. 258.

¹³⁸ ORMSBY, p. 158.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 152f.

impossible. Since God's power stands in no nexus with the impossible, He cannot be said to have limited possibilities.¹⁴²

Ormsby notes that the ghazalian view of the most perfect does not mean unchangeability: God can and He does incessantly change the 'most wonderful', and each new configuration is 'most wonderful'.¹⁴³ One should also be aware that al-Ghazali speaks about the most perfect world *in possibility* and later even about the most perfect *form* of the world in possibility (which may mean that the determinations or conditions for the world are most perfect, but which does not have to mean an actually most perfect world). However, al-Ghazali himself did not reflect on this thought more in his work.¹⁴⁴

One of the later critiques of Al-Ghazali was al-Baqa'i (d. in 1480). He reversed al Ghazali's theorem: '*Something more glorious than which is would be possible.*' It is not the intention of al-Baqa'i to deny the Creator's justice. Rather, he is emphasising the limited nature of humans. Human understanding could only view the world as imperfect. If the world is a sign, then not a sign of perfection, but a sign of what God could have done if he wanted. The obvious imperfections of the world only prove how little it reflects God's might. For al-Baqa'i, divine omnipotence becomes an article of faith that he consciously separates from the empirical realm.¹⁴⁵

The 19th century writer al-Jazā'irī points out that al-Ghazali's statement seems to be compatible with a condemned philosophical view saying that God creates out of necessity intrinsic to His nature and not out of free choice. Al-Ghazali's assertion is close also to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of 'the optimum' (*al-aṣlah*), which was repudiated by the Islamic orthodoxy.¹⁴⁶ However, al-Ghazali emphasizes God's free will, and his notion of necessity denotes not intrinsic necessity, but rather necessity by free choice.¹⁴⁷

I find problematic both the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite answer to the question of the objective validity of good and evil. Al-Ghazali is on the Ash'arite side of the emphasis. However, the rejection of the objective validity of good may lead to dangerous self-willing judgements in the case of unclarity. God is the ground for the objectiveness of good and evil. Even though humans cannot fully concern God, but they are His creations and are on the way towards Him thanks to His revelation. So they strive for the absolute good, even if it is not fully in their comprehension and ability.

Another criticized element in al-Ghazali's argumentation is his argument of correlation between perfect and imperfect, and the view that the imperfect serves as a 'ransom' for the perfect and enables knowledge of the perfect. There is a difference between correlative terms (which are understood by reference to each other) and contraries, which are opposites and not mutually implicative. The objection may be that there is no reason why recognition of the perfect requires the existence of the imperfect, as these are not true correlatives. Why could God not have given us knowledge through some other means, not requiring the misery and unhappiness of so many?¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² ORMSBY, p. 165.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 259.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. SCHULZE (Ibid.), p. 176.

¹⁴⁵ KERMANI, p. 88-89.

¹⁴⁶ ORMSBY, p. 34.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

Could not be any monstrosity justified by such a way? An afflicted person could complain, as al-Jazā'irī notes: *'Why am I a spectacle of distress in this world or the next, just so that the healthy may enjoy health and the happy their happiness [...]? Why am I not among those blessed in this world or the next, so that I might enjoy health or happiness?'*

In Europe, under the influence of Platon's *Timaeus*, al-Ghazali's younger contemporary Peter Abelard (d. 1142) posed the question whether God can make better or more things than He does make. He argued that *'God indeed does all the things of which He is capable, and does them as well as He can.'*¹⁴⁹ To say that the world could be better is to say that God is less good or just or generous than He might have been. Abelard's question and response engendered a debate within Latin Scholasticism. According to Hugh of St. Victor, Abelard's view threatened *'to subject divine omnipotence to a measure.'*¹⁵⁰ In discussions of the question the strategy became to distinguish between the essential and the accidental being or goodness of things and the world. The world in its essential nature cannot be better, but its accidental goodness might be immeasurably improved. However, it did not solve the problem, as Albertus Magnus (d. 1280) writes: *'I say that in His wisdom, He was not inclined to give more, and He was unwilling to give more; but why He was unwilling, I do not know. He, however, knows.'*¹⁵¹

The notion of the best of all worlds appeared later by Leibniz, and became obsolete very soon. Voltaire's poem concerning the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 made the optimism of Leibniz's theory seem untenable. *'This is the fatal know / you should untie. / Our evils do you cure, / when you deny?'* Kant then proved that all theoretical attempts at theodicy are doomed to failure.

By al-Ghazali there is no attempt undertaken to absolve God from the responsibility for the evil circumstances. He tries to give explanations for the evil, also for the evil of suffering. As Ormsby notes, the question of the ultimate authorship of evil, however, does not occupy so central position in his version of theodicy as in the Western thought.¹⁵²

One should always be aware of the context of al-Ghazali's writing. He does not want to give a reasoned proof of theodicy, but his statement belongs to the exhortation to a specific stage on the Sufi path. Al-Ghazali's explanations on suffering are rather homiletic, strengthening on the way of trust and abandonment to God. In the end, we can only accept God's mercy on faith. In my opinion, however, the quest for trust in God should not lead to the rejection of the radicality and scandal of evil in the world. I think the selfless view of the world does not result in the acknowledgement of its perfection, but the reality of evil becomes even more painful. We should see later by Job, how the fight against the injustice relates to the trust in God.

¹⁴⁹ ABELARD: *Theologia Christiana*; cited by ORMSBY, p. 84.

¹⁵⁰ HUGH of ST. VICTOR: *De sacramentis*; cited by ORMSBY, p. 85.

¹⁵¹ ALBERTUS MAGNUS: *Opera*; cited by ORMSBY, p. 87.

¹⁵² ORMSBY, p. 54.

The Book of Suffering and The Terror of God - Attar and Navid Kermani

*A fool calls out to the heavens:
'If what goes on down here does not move Your heart,
You can take mine.
Is Your heart really so stubborn?'*¹⁵³

The recent in Germany living writer and Orientalist of Iranian origin, Navid Kermani, presents in his book *The Terror of God* a different and far more tragical answer on suffering. He bases on the *Book of Suffering* by the 13th century Iranian poet and mystic Farododdin Attar, whereby he also reflects on his own experiences and is in constant dialogue with Christian, Jewish, Islamic and other authors, traditions and views. From the poets it is especially Heinrich Heine who stands close to him. It is the experience of Kermani's aunt, of the fools and saints presented by Attar, as well as the experience of Heine, on which Kermani's book is based – as Heine puts it: *'Why must the righteous man suffer so much on earth? That is the question I grapple with day and night on my martyr's bed.'*¹⁵⁴ Kermani asks the question so similar to the problem of Job: how can the suffering and injustice in the world be reconciled with the image of God that was taught to us?¹⁵⁵ Attar's response on Job's question is his 'book of suffering'.¹⁵⁶

The frame of Navid Kermani's book is his personal experience. His aunt Lobat, who was for him as a child an example of deep piousness and true warm-heartedness, had to suffer cruelly in her last years. She had strong pain for a long time, but she was still thanking God and staying patient believing in the merciful God and the reward for the innocent sufferings. After she suffered a stroke, her sufferings became cruel and could not move and talk any more, even though her mind stayed clear. *'I will never forget her gaze: it showed more than simply suffering, it showed rage and simultaneously deep childlike fear, in strained contemplation, clueless, helpless and at once ashamed'*¹⁵⁷ - remembers Kermani. *'At least Job could still lament; my aunt was denied even this every time she tried to articulate at least one sentence.'*¹⁵⁸ According to the family she had gone through the most dreadful process of dying. A wonder and relief in her last weeks was the ability to utter even some entire verses from a prayer or the Koran. She was clinging to God till the end.

Farododdin Attar lived in the 13th century in or near Nishapur in the region of Khurāsān (Khorasan) of Iran, where he worked as a pharmacist or 'druggist'. According to some sources he died during the Mongol invasion of Iran in 1221.¹⁵⁹ Attar was a mystical poet, dealing with themes and motives from Sufism. Attar's *Masnavi* (long spiritual poem) *The Conference of the Birds* takes up the motif of the journey of a soul: a flock of birds sets out to find their mythical king Simorg. In order to transcend the world of forms and see the formless, Simorg, who represents divine unity, has practised ascetism and developed the vision with which divine majesty can be witnessed.¹⁶⁰ At the end of their journey

¹⁵³ A story cited from Attar in N. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁴ HEINE: *Säkularausgabe*, vol. 22; cited by KERMANI (*Ibid.*), p. 22

¹⁵⁵ KERMANI, p. 13.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. KERMANI, p. 25.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶⁰ M. AMINRAZAVI: *God, creation, and the human person in Islam; in The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions*, p. 104.

the birds realize that Simorǧ is no one else than themselves (si=thirty, morǧ=birds) A journey of soul, but that of a single traveller through the cosmos, is also described in *The Book of Suffering*, Attar's longest and probably penultimate or last Masnavi. The stories of mystic saints which Attar was gathering his whole life, appear in this book. The work is consistently informed by the Sufi theory and practise, but at the same time, Attar poetically lifts up and sublimes the inner experience of mystic into an experience of being.¹⁶¹ Kermani notes that there are also a lot of motives, attitudes, images from the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition in Attar's work.¹⁶² Attar's verses have often specific Sufi connotations and possibilities of allegorical interpretation, but at the same time they develop existential, metaphysical and social meanings that can be understood both historically and universally.¹⁶³ Attar rails against inquisition, coercion and religious dogmatism (*ta'aşşob*). He could have in mind the violent confrontations between Hanafites and Shaffites in Nishapur during the second half of the 12th century.¹⁶⁴ Kermani notes: Attar's advocacy of religious tolerance (not a modern ideal of tolerance, but taking seriously the divine mercy and accepting the responsibility of the individual¹⁶⁵), his anger at the simple-mindedness of theologians, his depictions of poverty or the wilfulness of officials and his mockery of rich men and rulers – they are simultaneously concrete and allegorical.¹⁶⁶

Referring to the ritual of the forty-day retreat (*čeleh*),¹⁶⁷ which forms a part of the Islamic mysticism, *The Book of Suffering* recounts a journey through the cosmos in forty stages: each chapter poetically represents a state in the immersion.¹⁶⁸ In Sufism the number forty stands for endurance, patience and submission in suffering until fulfilment approaches. During the forty-day retreat in Sufism the student reports the illuminations, visions and insights ideally experienced during the meditations to the Sufi teacher-*pir*, who interprets them and gives new instructions.¹⁶⁹ In *The Book of Suffering* the personified consciousness as the 'wanderer of thought' stands in such a relationship to a *pir*. The wanderer of *The Book of Suffering* is in adverse situation, out of favour and full of anger with himself and the world. He knows no happiness and wherever he looks, he sees only misery, lies and deception. His suffering is what calls his *pir* who emphasizes that no one should embark on an inward journey without a leader's guidance. So the wanderer sets out to find salvation, hope or at least solace.¹⁷⁰ After reaching each stage of his journey (at the end of each chapter), the wanderer returns to the *pir* who explains and gives theological context to his experiences. The rather heretical and revolutionary view of the Book of Suffering, which blatantly contradicts the traditional understanding of Islam and the Koranic image of God in countless passages, is compensated by these theological

¹⁶¹ KERMANI, p. 33; German original p. 49.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁵ Attar even states dialectically that unbelief is a necessary and hence justified prerequisite for the recognition of faith. KERMANI, p. 64.

¹⁶⁶ KERMANI, p. 58; p. 61.

¹⁶⁷ Consisting of meditations, prayers, readings from Koran and often testing of body under the leading of a Sufi teacher/*pir*

¹⁶⁸ KERMANI, p. 36; German original p. 52.

¹⁶⁹ KERMANI, p. 36.

¹⁷⁰ The topos of the soul's journey was an important and fascinating topos in Orient too. For instance, the Merkabah mysticism that developed among the Palestinian Jews between the 3rd and 5th centuries describes the ascent of the soul leaving the earth and travelling through the different spheres before reaching its home in God's light-world. In Islamic tradition *The Book of Ascension* describes Mohammed's nocturnal heavenly journey. KERMANI, p. 45.

explanations and instructions of the *pir*, what may be the reason why the Book of Suffering was hardly ever perceived as heretical.¹⁷¹ The wanderer travels through the cosmos, but he sees only misery and pain throughout his journey: the suffering becomes even worse after getting closer to the paradise. Nobody can help the wanderer, not even the angels who themselves live in pain and fear from God.¹⁷² Only Mohammed gives him a hint: he should look within himself first, not in the world. So the wanderer travels through his self. The soul says: *'What you have sought is within you.'*¹⁷³ In the last chapter of the book it is noted that the wanderer ultimately finds his own soul, but the hymnal last chapter stands in tension with all the sad previous 39 chapters. As Kermani observes, the ostensibly hopeful ending seems strangely forced.¹⁷⁴ However, the last chapter is not the end of the book: it contains a long epilogue, in which the poet, still interrupted by other stories, speaks also about himself and his work. Attar says it would have been better to remain silent, for it is impossible to express the things said in the book. However, the pain squeezed out his verses, and he was unable to contain himself, because 'love made him drunk, consumed by longing and miserable.'¹⁷⁵ The final stories are characterized by no prospect of salvation and hope. As Kermani points out, the last chapter of the book is shifted by the epilogue to the utopian level. Attar still clings to the possibility of salvation, one could sink into the ocean of the soul – and yet the poet will never reach its shores, neither any ordinary person. The fundamental possibility of redemption is hold on to, but only as a lacuna (*Leerstelle*, empty space) – as the 'other' to the present state.¹⁷⁶

In *The Book of Suffering* Attar develops a cosmology of pain with an upwardly open scale of misfortune.¹⁷⁷ All worldly and transcendent phenomena are signs – however, not signs of God's compassion, but signs of despair, God's abstinence and the painful nullity of the world's course.¹⁷⁸ Even worse, they are the signs of a wrathful and cynical God. The closer one gets to God, the more the person suffers. All creatures, even the angels passed by the 'wanderer of thought', are sick with fear. The wanderer visits also Satan, who is himself a sufferer and a sacrifice of God's wilfulness: he is cursed *because* of his love to God, what made him once disobedient.¹⁷⁹ Attar does not console with

¹⁷¹ KERMANI, p. 41-42. As Gershom Sholem observes it, it is a feature of all mysticism having 'two fundamental, contradictory or complementary aspects: the one conservative, the other revolutionary.' (Citation from G. SCHOLEM: *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*)

¹⁷² There is a hadith with a similar structure: each section begins with supplicants praising the respective prophet. The prophets disappoint them with the response that they themselves are in need and are afraid of God's wrath. Only by Mohammed the believers find help: he intercedes for them with God and God accepts his intercession. However, Attar may have not known this hadith. KERMANI, p. 45, p. 228.

¹⁷³ KERMANI, p. 45.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁶ KERMANI, p. 49-51; German original: p. 70-71.

¹⁷⁷ KERMANI: *Der Schrecken Gottes*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁸ KERMANI, p. 43.

¹⁷⁹ KERMANI, p. 215. According to the Koran when God created Adam He ordered all his angels to kneel before the man. All the angels did so except Iblis (Satan). Since that time Iblis is an enemy and seducer of the people. (Cf. A. ASLAN, in *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 44.) The Sufi interpretation states that it was Iblis's absolute love to God that forbade him from devoting himself to any other being. So, against God's explicit command, he insisted on honouring God alone and - as some Sufis say - was more monotheistic than God Himself. According to a Sufi mythos, God's curse is seen as a test and Iblis is considered as the one who had the power to see God and got to know the mystical secret (KERMANI, p. 213; SCHULZE, p. 188.). One has to remember that in the Sufi tradition the place of the evil is the egoistic soul, so the respect for or the empathy with Iblis by some Sufis does not mean any cult of evil (see SCHULZE, p. 188.) A quotation from Iblis's lament by Attar: *'You will do well to learn from me, /But do not do the same as I have,*

the afterlife, but he expects even worse torment in death.¹⁸⁰ *'God in His justice is not simply hidden; if He were, one could call upon Him to appear. No – God is not just at all. That fact, or at least the fear that it is true, is what unsettles Attar's figures. Because God is terror for them, many of the fools are even afraid of being heard by Him, assuming that He will only torment them even more cruelly. It is better for such a God to remain distant.'*¹⁸¹

In *The Book of Suffering* God is certainly omnipotent and He can be known from the signs, but His goodness is fundamentally questioned. *'He could alter the pitiful fate of humans if He desired, but He simply does not want to do so; He is not interested – in fact, He even seems to enjoy tormenting humans.'*¹⁸² Attar's protagonists *'know what kind of God they have, for He constantly reveals Himself through His deeds – if only He were less manifest! The problem with God's wisdom is not that it is inaccessible, but that it does not serve the good of humans. The problem is God's absolute wilfulness, not the limited nature of human understanding.'*¹⁸³ Even if there are deeper realities which the man may not understand, Kermani believes it would not be a reason for more optimism by Attar: *'Attar would not have denied the existence of the seabed, but, firstly, he would not have been so sure that it really holds anything comforting and, secondly, he would not have had any hope of reaching such depth anyway.'*¹⁸⁴ There is no security by God in Attar's *Book of Suffering* and according to the early mystics of Sufism, who spoke about the *makr* or 'cunning' of God (*Arglist Gottes*): the Creator lulls his most loyal worshipper into a sense of security only to cast them suddenly and all the deeper into misery.¹⁸⁵ In Attar and often in Islamic mysticism, God shirks the responsibility He has imposed on Himself. In *The Book of Secrets*, Attar also portrays God as a potter who moulds first his pots very artfully but then smashes them for his amusement.

Kermani points out some similarities and differences between Attar and Augustine. Nothing we do makes us worthy of God's grace, says Augustine. Attar writes: *'God calls whomever He calls without reason, and turns away whomever He turns away without reason.'*¹⁸⁶ Attar follows the Ash'arite theology in believing that misfortune is also caused by God. God is responsible for all the happenings, but by Augustine He is not evil and the suffering is a means to the end of discipline and education. However, Attar's people see no such purpose of the violence and terror of God.¹⁸⁷ The conception of humans is by Attar and Augustine diametrically opposed. Augustine speaks about the original sin and defends the collective punishment. For Attar humans are by no means guilty by definition. In his tale, the pain usually strikes innocents. While Augustine complains about the sin of the humans, Attar's

never, /Go through a hundred worlds of compassion, /Only to end unwanted on the path of the cursed. / I bear the curse of the truthful, keep away.' The *pir* speaks then conventionally about Satan's egoism, falseness and cunning but even he himself explains with empathy that it is Iblis's jealous love that causes him to keep humans away from God. *'I stand in the distance, distant from Him, with neither body nor reason, /'twould be better for me to burn, than to be distant from Him. [...] Even though I was chased from his doorstep, / My gaze is still fixed on the path to Him, [...] Because I once knew the secret, / I can look nowhere else but to Him.'* Some mystics, and in certain passages also Attar, expressed the hope that Iblis might return to God at the end – though that would also herald the end of days. KERMANI, p. 214-216.

¹⁸⁰ KERMANI, p. 52.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

humans complain about God. *'Attar's figures dare to deny the divine attribute that would seem a constitutive part of monotheism, namely goodness, with all its aspects such as justice, love and compassion.'*¹⁸⁸

Attar turns the view of the Koran on its head. In the Koran, contrary to the Hebrew Bible, the possibility of God's concealment is not mentioned, whereas the disloyalty of humans, their refusal to recognize God's signs and their turning away from God is brought up. The Muslims should submit and devote themselves to God with gratitude and through good deeds. Turning away from God is unbelief and ingratitude.¹⁸⁹ Attar's people, however, do something what the Koran does not envisage: they either devote to God, but without gratitude, or they recognize God's power, but without submitting patiently to His will. Attar sometimes speaks biblically about the distance and concealment of the Creator, but even more often about the cruelty of His closeness:

*'Attar turns the conventional view on its head – but it remains the Koranic view. A fool is caught unawares by a storm while wandering through a desert. The lightning tries to burn him, the rain tries to drown him. Then a voice calls out to the fool from the storm-lashed heavens [...]: »God is with you, be without fear.« »But that's exactly what I'm afraid of«, screams the fool. »It's because He is with me that I'm afraid«*¹⁹⁰

Attar's people, saints and fools are lamenting and rebelling against God, opposing so the Koranic teaching. With this motive Attar is much closer to the Hebrew Scriptures. Such resistance is according to Kermani an expression of the God-given freedom of humans what seems to be in tension with the Koranic emphasis of submitting oneself to the will of God.¹⁹¹ Kermani shows the similarities between Attar's book and the biblical Job. The quarrelling with God meant, in the tradition of Judaism, a possibility of faithful relation to God (see e.g. the stories about Moses in the Midrashim or some Hasidic stories¹⁹²).¹⁹³ Also Muslim mystics accepted the practice of quarrelling with God, limiting it to those in intimate relationship with Him (for instance, al-Ghazali discusses it in a well-meaning fashion concerning some prophets). Also Attar emphasises that only those who are intimate with God may quarrel with Him. By Attar beside the saints they are first of all the fools (*Narren, diwāneh*), as those wise outsiders, who know the secrets and are free to quarrel with God: *'Those with reason are obliged to follow the law, and fools are obliged to honour love.'*¹⁹⁴ Contrary to all the previously mentioned Jewish and Islamic traditions, the quarrelling turns out to be oft drastic in *The Book of Suffering*. The presumptuous prayer is almost never answered; and when it is, the story has such sarcastic a tone that it can hardly be read as a proof of God's goodness.¹⁹⁵ The fight with God is at

¹⁸⁸ Kermani, p. 113.

¹⁸⁹ Kermani, p. 175.

¹⁹⁰ Kermani, p. 174.

¹⁹¹ The disobedience and revolt of the saints and Job could be seen as an act pleasing God, as God wants human freedom and emancipation. N. Kermani: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils in der Welt*, in: I. U. Dalferth, K. Lehmann, N. Kermani: *Das Böse. Drei Annäherungen*. p. 117.

¹⁹² Kermani: *Der Schrecken Gottes*, p. 234f; see also later (Jewish views)

¹⁹³ The motive of the rebellious believer is found in the Hinduism too – the man seems to be morally superior, and his rebellion is at the end rewarded from God. In Christianity the revolt against God appears especially in the secular philosophy and literature. Cf. Kermani, 178f.

¹⁹⁴ Kermani, p. 144; p. 163.

¹⁹⁵ A story for illustration: *'A destitute fool enters the mosque and asks God for a hundred dinars. Nothing happens. The fool grows angry and calls out: »If you don't want to give me the money, You might as well bring the mosque crashing down!« The roof of the mosque begins to crumble away, and the tiles threaten to bury the*

the same time tragic and grotesque in *The Book of Suffering*. Attar's rebelling Prometheus (the fools) takes no one seriously.¹⁹⁶ God is overwhelmingly powerful and superior.¹⁹⁷ The grotesque quality comes about also because the fools are fully aware of their powerlessness and the absurdity of their threats: *'He knows that his jokes are the last before his demise, but in this humour, this self-irony, he preserves a final hint of resistance, even superiority: as long as he laughs at his destroyer, he foils His work, and is not yet destroyed.'*¹⁹⁸

Still, it is the intimate love to God what makes Attar's saints and fools fight with Him. Whoever rejects God cannot accuse Him of anything. *'But whoever has been abandoned, cast out or rejected – by their mother, their lover or God – feels their solitude the most cruelly.'* Attar's people long for God, but at the same time they feel abandoned by Him. It is their love to Him and their sense of reality what makes them rebel: *'Job or the fools, saints and Dervishes in The Book of Suffering do not lose their faith in God when they rebel against Him; in their despair, they are more religious than the believers who praise God, but turn a blind eye to the real state of His creation. Those whose love exceeds the conventional degree dare to demand the kind of God He Himself revealed to them.'*¹⁹⁹ It is for example the Koranic duty to ensure a livelihood for all people what God is accused to have violated.²⁰⁰ These pious oppose God by remaining loyal to His words when they appeal to his compassion.²⁰¹ These saints, prophets and fools seem to surpass the Creator in their morality and compassion.²⁰² The lament and rebellion are here moments of belief.²⁰³ *'The people in The Book of Suffering, [...] believe in God; they believe in Him no matter what. Because they love Him, they cannot be content with the way He shows Himself in the world. They call Him to account.'*²⁰⁴

Love is a fixed element in the piety described by Attar: *'Although God and the world as He has arranged it give little cause for contentment – on the contrary, there is every reason for complaint – humans yearn for Him. This is the reason to suffer and yet believe, to praise God and curse Him, to renounce Him and thirst for Him.'* The love may even exceed to masochistic extremes: one may even beg God to cause him more suffering, *'as every blow from their beloved is superior to a thousand acts of affection because it comes from the beloved, as Attar says.'*²⁰⁵ One cannot get away from God for the simple reason that there is no other²⁰⁶ - this is the human situation expressed in Attar's book: *'The people in The Book of Suffering – the fools, the wise men, the lovers – cannot help it: they are damned to God. [...] The love for God felt by Attar's wise men and fools does not contradict their*

fool. »That's one request You've certainly fulfilled very quickly If I know You, You'll probably even skimp on the blood money after You've killed me.« The ceiling continues to crumble, and the fool makes a run for it.'

KERMANI, p. 137

¹⁹⁶ KERMANI, p. 176.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. KERMANI, p. 147.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 205.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 142.

²⁰¹ Kermani notes that Emmanuel Lévinas described this attitude in Judaism as ,loving the Torah more than God.' KERMANI, p. 163.

²⁰² A story from the Sufi literature about Bayezid Bestami: ,*Bayezid is even willing to sacrifice himself to save humanity from hell: »My God, if, in Your infinite knowledge, You know that You will punish someone with hell, make my body so large in hell that there will be no room for anyone else beside me.«* KERMANI, p. 153.

²⁰³ KERMANI, p. 162; N, KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils in der Welt*, in: I. U. DALFERTH, K.

LEHMANN, N. KERMANI: *Das Böse. Drei Annäherungen*, p. 116.

²⁰⁴ KERMANI, p. 177.

²⁰⁵ KERMANI, p. 216; Cf. stories from Attar, KERMANI, p. 158f.

²⁰⁶ KERMANI, p. 161.

*rebellion; it conditions it. Fanatically devoted to the Creator, they experience Him in all His terror.*²⁰⁷ At the end, the possibility of redemption remains opened by Attar, but rather in a utopian sense, as the ‘other’ what could exist.²⁰⁸ Reconciliation itself is not abandoned, but it seems that the hope of attaining it is: there is a door, and who knows what lies behind it, but ‘*we all remain outside like the knocker at the door*’, as Attar writes in his *Book of Secrets*.²⁰⁹ Attar’s figures are not reconciled, neither is their situation revised, but one may have the feeling that if any people at all are to find salvation, they will be more likely the rebellious fouls and blasphemous saints.²¹⁰ The hope that remains by Attar is the hope of the hopeless. If God makes people suffer without any reason, he could be free to give them mercy and joy without any reason. The last lines of the *Book of Suffering* end with the hope that the one who had the power to do all what happened, will have the power to make it as nothing: ‘*Pull me by the hand, if you can, /From this confusion, as if nothing had happened.*’²¹¹

Heine writes about the human situation: ‘*Human misery is too great. One must believe.*’²¹² All that remained for Kermani’s aunt at the end of her life was the belief and clinging to God, expressed in the prayers and verses she uttered till the last: ‘*she remained so devout to the end that God could not exist if He did not bless her.*’²¹³ Kermani ends his book with the Arabic verse from the Koran: ‘*Indeed we belong to God - and indeed to Him we will return.*’ (Surah 2:156)

Some critical remarks

In Attar’s *Book of Suffering* Kermani finds an alternative answer beside the denial of God in atheism and the justification of God in the many variations of theodicy: ‘*God exists, but He neither loves us nor is just. There is a meaning to it all, but a disastrous one.*’²¹⁴ It is an answer which clearly opposes the Koran’s emphasis on God’s mercifulness. Attar’s people may appeal to the Creator and the Koranic revelation of God, but the strong emphasis on the covenantal faithfulness and the self-sacrificing love of God is missing, which mean so much for the Jews and Christians.

The tragic view of God in Attar’s *Book of Suffering* seems to me partly as a consequence of the one-sidedness and tensions in the Koran. How can the cruelty and innocent sufferings in the world be reconcilable with the merciful God, whose signs are recognizable and who created the universe for the good of the humans (not affected by any structural sin)?²¹⁵ Is the profound reality of evil not taken too lightly and does the sin of humans not have deeper consequences? The lament to God is in the Koran negatively viewed. However, the reality of the world did not let many Muslims to submit themselves patiently, but they had to cry out – Attar, his saints and fools, as well as Kermani are such

²⁰⁷ KERMANI, p. 162; The ultimate meaning of love is also expressed in Attar’s words read in the *Conference of the Birds*: ‘*Whoever is firmly rooted in love / Will go beyond unbelief and Islam.*’ KERMANI, p. 157.

²⁰⁸ KERMANI, p. 52.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52-53.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²¹² HEINE; cited by KERMANI, p. 22

²¹³ KERMANI, p. 178; p. 222.

²¹⁴ KERMANI, p. 178.

²¹⁵ I find this view also problematic. According to the Koran the man is the sense and the aim of creation, with the responsibility to fulfil the creation. (KERMANI: *Das Schrecken Gottes*, p. 223) Is the reality of sin taken seriously? And does the creation not have also worth in itself? Is it just a tool for the humans and for their relation to God? However, the Sufis speak – similarly to Christians – about creation as an act of love.

examples. Their books are also laments to God in the name of those innocent sufferers whose voice may not be heard.

In Attar's point of view God is directly responsible for all the happenings, and there is no attempt undertaken to release Him from this responsibility. On the other hand, all the evil and suffering is struck in His face. He is the tormentor and healer in one person,²¹⁶ and in *The Book of Suffering* the healings come very scarcely for. I find this view consequent, but one could ask whether life does not also have another side. One would ask whether much suffering could not be relieved and a lot of evil defeated, when the man would see more truly also his own responsibility. Kermani and Attar present the sadness of reality so strongly that it causes our sensitivity to wake up, look around and see more clearly. What is more, one should never forget to ask and think further.

*'It seems to me that the Book of Job is not so much a book about God or the injustice of the world; it is a book about faith, and how faith also includes being true to oneself against God, opening one's eyes to creation, and wrestling with the Creator if necessary, because it expresses the most precious thing God has given humanity: freedom.'*²¹⁷ Kermani's emphasis on human freedom to quarrel with God when facing injustice and so to be a real successor of God seems to be in tension with the Koranic emphasis on submitting oneself to the will of God and thus to fulfil the creation and the true human identity of being God's successor (khalif).²¹⁸ The understanding of freedom and the reason for morality would be worthy of further considerations. When one protests against God, how is his right ultimately founded? Can one appeal to the Koranic revelation of God against to His revelation in the world?

In spite of the similarities with the biblical Job and the quarrelling with God in Judaism, they are also important differences of which Kermani is partly aware. He writes: *'This is the very paradox of that heretical piety with which Attar follows on from the Bible: clinging to God, but simultaneously denying Him the attribute of goodness, and finally the rewarding of this negative emotion towards God – there are all elements of the Job motif, which is precisely not constituted by mere accusation or mere forbearance.'*²¹⁹ However, it is precisely the presupposition of God's justice what makes Job rebel and quarrel with God in the situation of unjust suffering. Kermani knows the quarrellers in most of the Jewish tradition have still hope in God, and I think this is the case even by Job and in the dark Psalms.²²⁰ If God was considered hopelessly evil, would it make sense to quarrel with Him and appeal to his salvation (see the Psalm of death 88)? In my opinion, it is largely the belief in God's promise and the experience of his redeeming action in history what is the ground for protest and lament in the face of the experienced reality. Without hope and belief in the possibility of a different reality one would have to accept the given reality as it is. Does the lament to God have any sense if God is hopelessly self-contradictory? Is the protest not already an expression of an attitude that is more than mere resignation? Most saints of Attar, however, seem to have scarcely any hope and belief in God's justice.²²¹

²¹⁶ KERMANI, p. 211.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 177.

²¹⁸ Cf. KERMANI, p. 175f.

²¹⁹ KERMANI, p. 166.

²²⁰ Cf. KERMANI, p. 190.

²²¹ KERMANI, p. 190.

Concerning Attar's people, Kermani writes: *'So someone who accuses God may love Him, but seems to have lost faith in being loved.'*²²² This is the tragic love of the saints and fools of The Book of Suffering: they long for God, they love Him, but without being responded with love. However, what makes these people still talk and fight with God? Why do they not sink into resignation and silence of hopelessness? First of all, it is love what makes them talk – God is crucially important for them and they simply cannot leave him. Is this a love without any trust? From my point of view, here also lies a hidden, very discrete hope and trust. It must not be the hope for a happy end or for a change of situation. I think it could be the hope that the One who made Attar's saints and fools love so much, is not at last that cruel and cynical God as He shows himself. The fight against the horrible situation is also a sign of love: one cannot accept injustice, precisely because of the love to God and to the people.

The connection to God may be experienced in suffering, as Margarete Susman writes about the fate of the Jewish people: *'It is the scarcely utterable secret that the dark ring of fate in which God has imprisoned His people today is the ring of love.'* *'An atom of pain from Him in your heart / Is better than anything you will ever find in both worlds'* – so teaches by Attar a sheikh his novice, saying that God cannot be named nor studied, but only experienced through pain.²²³ The love by Attar is a tragic, even sometimes masochistic love to the Creator, who makes people suffer. How can the tension be hold on between the life-giving Creator and the destructive Almighty God? Attar and Kermani do not try to give an explanation for the evil, but show this tension very strongly. The question of theodicy is directed to God.

Kermani notes that the motive of quarrelling with God is missing largely in the Christian spirituality, even in the mysticism. The suffering of the mystics is placed in a line with that of Jesus Christ, and the experience of darkness is seen as a necessary phase on the way to the divine light.²²⁴ Concerning the Christian passion mysticism and with reference to Jürgen Moltmann Kermani says that if God suffers Himself, the protest becomes superfluous and He is no longer present as a recipient of accusation.²²⁵ However, does God's suffering really exclude the possibility of the lament towards Him? Does God's suffering not even intensify the question of theodicy? I think there are two essential elements of the Christian belief which Kermani does not take appropriately into account: the Christological fundament of the Christian hope and the eschatological dimension of faith. In his book *The Way of Jesus Christ* Moltmann speaks about a theodicy-process, which begins with the resurrection of the crucified Christ and can be accomplished only eschatologically. Job's question has to remain open until God answers it.²²⁶ In my opinion, the question of theodicy in Christianity gets a different accentuation than in Islam and in Judaism. The irruption of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ is the foundation of the hope for its completion. On the other hand, the reality of evil and suffering has to be taken seriously, and even the wounds of the resurrected Lord remind us. Beside the way of the cross and passion mysticism, which can be also ways of opposing evil, the lament and protest are

²²² KERMANI, p. 24.

²²³ KERMANI, p. 159.

²²⁴ KERMANI, p. 196-197; German original: p. 251.

²²⁵ KERMANI, p. 197; p. 122.

²²⁶ MOLTSMANN: *Der Weg Jesu Christi, Christologie in messianischen Dimensionen*, Chr. Kaiser, München 1989, p. 205.

possible and important expressions of faith. Kermani appreciates the presence and importance of the Job-motive by some recent Christian theologians.²²⁷

Karl Barth understands the Book of Job as showing the mutual freedom of God and man/Job, and the indestructible connection of God to the man/Job.²²⁸ In my opinion, by Attar and Kermani there is a similar direction of experience and thought, but seen much more from the human side. Attar's people love God for 'nothing', even more, in spite of all the suffering that happens to them. God does whatever he wants to do, without any reason, seeming to be indifferent. However, here lies also the only hope for mercy – as Attar puts it in the Epilogue:

*'As all that You do is without reason,
Have mercy without reason, O ruler of worlds.
Though unbelief and sin weigh heavily on me,
A word of Your forgiveness, and I will be free.
If you can give me but an atom of joy,
Then do it, do you not always give without reason?'*²²⁹

From the Christian view I see Attar's people standing under the cross of Jesus of Nazareth: there, where the one, who loved God and people with the greatest love, was cruelly crucified. Is there something left open for those saints of Attar and Kermani, who dreadfully suffered and died? Is there hope for the creation longing and groining in pain?

²²⁷ Theologians as Johann Baptist Metz, Karl-Josef Kuschel. Cf. KERMANI, p. 203.

²²⁸ G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 359.

²²⁹ KERMANI, p. 220.

Confronting the Question of Evil and Suffering in Judaism

The sufferings during the Jewish history, especially the experience of exile, the persecutions and the Holocaust, deeply challenged the Jewish theological thinking. The firm Jewish belief that the God of covenant has unmistakably shown his hand in particular events in the past, led inevitably to the question of the meaning of dreadful experiences of the chosen people and the question of God's apparent hiddenness. The Hebrew Bible itself contains different attempts of understanding and interpreting suffering. First of all, I would like to characterise some important approaches to the question of theodicy and the problem of evil and suffering in the Jewish tradition.

The **Hebrew Scriptures** speak in Genesis about the goodness of God's creation and about the man who is created in the image of God (*zelem elohim*).²³⁰ The man's alienation from God results in evil and suffering in the creation. Seeing man's wickedness God even regrets creating him, but after the flood he creates a covenant with Noah and his descendants, and later particularly a covenant with Abraham.²³¹ Evil may be seen as disorder, similar to the chaos or formless waste of the pre-created state (*tohu wabohu*),²³² but the Scriptures reject any dualistic thinking. Isaiah emphasises that there is no second transcendent principle: good and evil come both from God.²³³ We find in the Hebrew Bible a variety of accounts of suffering: the understanding of suffering as a result of man's alienation (Genesis 2), as punishment for sins and opportunity for conversion (cause-and-effect connection in the Proverbs and the deuteronomic emphasis on the covenantal relationship, God's justice, but also mercy), as a test of faith (Abraham's story with Isaac in Genesis 22, Job's Prologue), as sacrifice and foundation for redemption (Isaiah 53), but also the experience that suffering itself is not reasonably understandable (especially the Book of Job). In the canonized Hebrew Bible itself, the suggestion that the solution to suffering lies in the life after death, is not really present (an emerging belief in life after death can be seen especially in the later parts of the Scripture, as Daniel 12:1-4)²³⁴

In the 2nd century BC, during the Maccabean revolt Jews were martyred on a large scale for their faith, and it is this time that there appears a stronger emphasis on the life after death (see 2 Maccabees 7). The suffering and death of the martyrs is described in sacrificial terms as a death on behalf of the community (4 Maccabees).²³⁵

Another area in which a Jewish response on suffering was explored, is the apocalyptic. The fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD was a decisive event. 2 Baruch 20:2 suggests that Jerusalem was

²³⁰ Cf. YAIR LORBERBAUM: *Imago Dei in Judaism: Early Rabbinic Literature, Philosophy, and Kabbalah*, in *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World, and the Image of the Human in the World Religions* (Ed. P. KOSLOWSKI), p. 57f.

²³¹ Cf. D. KROCHMALNIK: *Das Böse in der jüdischen Tradition*, in *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen* (Hg. J. LAUBE), p. 14f.

²³² Jeremiah 12:4 uses the same word as in Genesis 1:2 *For My people are foolish, They know Me not; They are stupid children, And they have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, But to do good they do not know. I looked on the earth, and behold, it was formless and void; And to the heavens, and they had no light.* (Jeremiah 4: 22- 23 NAS), Cf. J. BOWKER: *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, p. 8-13.

²³³ *'I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness. I make weal and create woe. I am the Lord, who do all these things.'* Isaiah 45:6f

²³⁴ Cf. BOWKER, p. 12-24; Cf. PETR SLÁMA: *Utrpení (biblický, starozákonní pohled)* - přednáška v rámci farářského kurzu Spolku evangelických kazatelů 27. ledna 2015.

²³⁵ Cf. BOWKER, p. 26-27.

destroyed in order to hasten the final visitation of God. 4 Esra emphasises the limitation of human understanding.

After the fall of Jerusalem, the main developments were concentrated in Rabbinic Judaism. **In the normative literature of Rabbinic Judaism**, the classical response that suffering is a consequence of sin frequently reappears, although even the Babylonian Talmud (in tractate Shabbat 55) raises objections to this view.²³⁶ The rabbinic view of Job is ambivalent.²³⁷ The other main line of Biblical response is also reasserted in the normative rabbinic period, namely that suffering is a test to which all are subjected. In the midrash Exodus (Shemot) Rabbah, according to R. Aha, suffering is one of the four great blessings: *'God wished to give men four things, Torah, suffering, sacrifice and prayer, but they were unwilling to accept them.'*²³⁸ According to the words of R. Simeon b. Yohai in the Babylonian Talmud, the blessings cannot be reached without suffering: *'The Holy One, blessed be he, gave Israel three precious gifts, Torah, the land of Israel and the world to come, but none of them were given except through suffering.'*²³⁹ The understanding that suffering purges and leads to life is of central importance in the rabbinic thinking. R. Huna comments to Genesis: *'»And, behold, it was very good«, refers to the distribution (lit., »the measure«) of suffering. But can suffering actually be »very good«? Yes, because through suffering men attain to life in the world to come.'*²⁴⁰ From the Sifre to Deuteronomy: *'We should not simply accept evil as well as good from God, but we should in fact rejoice over sufferings more than over good, for if a man prospers all his life his sins are not forgiven him. But they are forgiven him through sufferings.'*²⁴¹ According to the rabbinic understanding the man possesses two inclinations - the good and evil inclination (*yezer*), but the Creator gave the means to resist the evil inclination: the Torah,²⁴² and according to some interpretation also the Day of Atonement as a means of renewed grace in the struggle, and the sufferings for the same purpose.²⁴³ Suffering is a way of atonement and brings us closer to the salvation, not only for the individual, but for the others: *'He who gladly bears the sufferings that befall him brings salvation to the world.'*²⁴⁴

The sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22 became an example for the martyrs during the Maccabean Revolt, the Roman persecutions or later the persecutions in the time of the crusades. The sanctification of God's name through offering one's life gave meaning for the martyrs.²⁴⁵ One of the greatest examples of the martyrs is the tanna rabbi Akiva b. Josef, who was executed by the Romans in 137 AD: *'While*

²³⁶ http://www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath_55.html#PARTb; BOWKER, p. 32.

²³⁷ The talmudic and midrashic writers are fascinated by the character of Job, but we find critical voices too: according to rabbi Akiva only the beginning and the end of the book are praiseworthy, but Job was mistaken in questioning his suffering, since others suffered much more (*Semachot* 8, *Midrash Tehillim* 26:2). Raba suggests that dust should be stuffed in Job's mouth for blaming God for the evil in the world (*Baba Bathra* 18a), O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 28, 246; Cf. A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 269.

²³⁸ Shem. R. 30:13, cited by BOWKER (Ibid.), p. 34.

²³⁹ Babylonian Talmud Ber. 5a, cited by BOWKER, p. 34; (see also http://www.come-and-hear.com/berakoth/berakoth_5.html)

²⁴⁰ Midrash Genesis Rabbah (Ber. R.) 9:8, cited by BOWKER, p. 35.

²⁴¹ Sifre on Dt., Waethhanan, 32., cited by BOWKER, p. 35.

²⁴² Cf. e. g. Talmud Bava Bathra, Hiob 16 (Cf. O. LEAMAN: *Hiob und das Leid: Ursprung des Bösen, Leiden Gottes und Überwindung des Bösen im talmudischen und kabbalistischen Judentum*, in: P. KOSLOWSKI (Hrsg.): *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 111)

²⁴³ BOWKER, p. 37; Cf. R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in A. LOICHINGER, A: KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 190.

²⁴⁴ Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 8a; cited by BOWKER, p. 37.

²⁴⁵ R. SCHMITZ, in: A. LOICHINGER, A: KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 195.

*Akiba was being tortured, the time for saying the shema came round. He said it and laughed out loud. The Roman officer in charge said to him: »Old man are you in touch with magic powers, or are you trying to make light of your sufferings, that you laugh in your agony?« R. Akiba said, »Neither; all my life whenever I have said the shema, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and might', I have been sad, for I wondered when I would be able to fulfil the command. I have loved God with all my heart and with all my might, but I could not see how to love him with all my soul. But now I am giving my life, and the hour for saying the shema has come, and I do not waver. Is it not right that I should laugh?« And as he spoke these things, his soul departed.*²⁴⁶ The angels who watched Akiva's suffering are said to have complained that this seemed to be a strange reward for upholding the Torah, to which they received the dusty response from God that the world would be turned to water if they said another word.²⁴⁷

The Aggadah says that God's *Shekhina* (His manifest glory, His indwelling and special presence) goes with Israel into the exile, and God mourns for the loss of the Temple and suffers with His people.²⁴⁸ God's Presence does not leave His people, even in suffering or impurity: the Divine Presence is with the sick man and with the exiled people too.²⁴⁹ This thought was further unfolded in the later Kabbalah.²⁵⁰

In the Babylonian Talmud is mentioned a Messiah ben Joseph, who is one of the four craftsmen or messianic figures²⁵¹ and appears in apocalypses of later centuries and in the midrash literature.²⁵² This Messiah ben Joseph is a suffering Messiah, who is slain.²⁵³ Consequently, the Messiah ben David brings victory.

From the Jewish philosophers, I have chosen the great medieval philosopher **Moses Maimonides** to illustrate an interpretation of suffering and evil. In his *Guide for the Perplexed* he devotes a long section to the problems of evil and providence. Maimonides understands evil as the absence of good.²⁵⁴ He differentiates between three kinds of evil: the evil inherent in the fact of being subject to natural changes and external influences, the evil caused by people against others, and finally the most common kind of evil caused to oneself by one's own action. According to him Job lacked the rationality that he recognized and accepted at the end, and so he recognized the limits of this rationality too. Neither was Job's ethical motivation on a high level before. Maimonides identifies Satan with the inclination to evil and with the imagination which leads into false direction (e.g. that the aspects of material life are most important in life). It is therefore important to purge the thoughts. Concerning providence, Maimonides argues with the negative theology saying that divine

²⁴⁶ Jerusalem Talmud Berakhot 9:7, cited by BOWKER, p. 36.

²⁴⁷ Menachot 29b, O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 246.

²⁴⁸ SCH. BEN-CHORIN: *Als Gott schwieg*, p. 53.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Babylonian Talmud tractate Shabbat 12b and tractate Megillah 29a

²⁵⁰ Cf. R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 193.

²⁵¹ Babylonian Talmud tractate Sukkah 52, <http://juchre.org/talmud/sukkah/sukkah3.htm#52a>

²⁵² Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN (Ibid.), p. 51.

²⁵³ Cf. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 192; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah_ben_Joseph

²⁵⁴ Cf. A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 40.

providence is different from our human understandings of providence.²⁵⁵ Maimonides denies any possibility of objective knowledge of God, but he insists upon the importance in our seeking to come as close as possible to acting in the way in which God acts.²⁵⁶

The **Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah**, speaks about God's Shekhina who goes into exile and suffers with the creation.²⁵⁷ According to the kabbalists, the separation in the creation is needed for the structure of the world, but it was a risky action (the separation of waters is not described as good in Genesis). Evil happens when channels between the spheres of reality are blocked and the energy becomes part of a hostile power.²⁵⁸ The book *Bahir* sees evil as a counterpole in God himself.²⁵⁹ According to another kabbalist understanding, evil exists outside the divine emanations, but sometimes comes with these emanations down and can be activated through improper actions of humans.²⁶⁰ In the Lurianic Kabbalah, the self-limitation of God called Tzimtzum was needed for the creation. God contracted part of God's self into vessels of light to create the world, but these vessels shattered and it is a human task (by following the Torah and praying) to help to release the divine sparks trapped within the material of creation and thus helping God to return from the exile and to bring forth the salvation.²⁶¹

According to the **Hasidism**, the pietistic-mystical movement emerging in the 18th century in the Eastern European Judaism, God wants to have joyful people. It is Satan who darkens our soul, pulls it down into suffering and distress and thus draws it away from God.²⁶² Reb Bunam says: '*Hasidim, even when they are bedridden, manage to sing*', and singing means the uplifting of existence to God.²⁶³ The inner relationship of the Tzadikim with God also allows fighting and arguing with Him that appears in the Hasidic stories.²⁶⁴ Like Jewish mysticism, Hasidism speaks about the suffering *Shekhina*. The coming of the Messiah has to be prepared by God's people and depends on their repentance and following the Torah. The worsening of evil and suffering in the world may be a sign

²⁵⁵ O. LEAMAN: *Hiob und das Leid: Ursprung des Bösen, Leiden Gottes und Überwindung des Bösen im talmudischen und kabbalistischen Judentum*, in P. KOSLOWSKI (Hrsg.): *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 104-110.

²⁵⁶ O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 178.

²⁵⁷ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 25; Cf. M. de SAINT CHERON: *ELIE WIESEL. Zlo a exil*, p. 102.

²⁵⁸ O. LEAMAN: *Hiob und das Leid: Ursprung des Bösen, Leiden Gottes und Überwindung des Bösen im talmudischen und kabbalistischen Judentum*, in: P. KOSLOWSKI (Hrsg.): *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p.113-114.

²⁵⁹ a divine property lying on the north, D. KROCHMALNIK: *Das Böse in der jüdischen Tradition*, in: *Das Böse in den Weltreligionen* (Hg. J. LAUBE), p. 57; Cf. pp. 57-59.

²⁶⁰ O. LEAMAN: *Hiob und das Leid: Ursprung des Bösen, Leiden Gottes und Überwindung des Bösen im talmudischen und kabbalistischen Judentum*, in: P. KOSLOWSKI (Hrsg.): *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p.113-114.

²⁶¹ This task is called *tikkun olam* – repairing the world. CH. WIESE: '*Weltabenteuer Gottes' und 'Heiligkeit des Lebens'*', in: *Prinzip Zukunft: Im Dialog mit Hans Jonas* (R. Seidel, M. Endruweit Hrsg.), p. 85.

²⁶² SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 54.

²⁶³ A. J. HESCHEL: *The Passion for Truth*, p. 284.

²⁶⁴ Cf. stories cited by KERMANI, p. 183f. An example: '*A simple tailor prays: 'You wish me to repent my sins, but I have committed only minor offences: I may have kept some leftover cloth, or I may have eaten in a gentile house without washing my hand. But You, O Lord, have committed grave sins: You have taken babies from their mothers and mothers from their babies. Let's strike a deal: You forgive me, and then I will forgive You.'* 'Why did you let God off so lightly?' *Levi Yitzchak asked the tailor when he told him of his prayer the following day. 'You should have forced Him to redeem the whole Israel.'* (NEWMAN: *The Hasidic Anthology: Tales and Teachings of the Hasidim*, p. 57)

of the soon-to-be coming of the Messiah.²⁶⁵ Hasidism had great influence on Martin Buber, whose thinking (together with F. Rosenzweig) represents an existential turn in the Jewish philosophy.²⁶⁶

The nameless sufferings and depersonalising mass deaths during the Holocaust deeply challenged the Jewish thinking and gave rise to a philosophy and theology **after Auschwitz**. Richard Rubinstein concludes that the belief in the Jewish God is not any more possible and in his later works he seems to adhere to a more mystical and immanent notion of God.²⁶⁷ According to Emil Fackenheim it is not possible to find any traditional explanation or interpretation to the Holocaust, but he insists on the necessity of the maintenance of Jewish faith (not to grant posthumous victory to Nazism) and calls for an active resistance to the policy of murder and genocide in contrast to the passivity of previous generations.²⁶⁸ Eliezer Berkovits still emphasises the importance of the traditional notion of *Kiddush ha-Shem*²⁶⁹ and talks about God's mysterious hiddenness at some points in time²⁷⁰ but also his continuing interventions and revelation.²⁷¹ Two other very important writers after Holocaust are Elie Wiesel and Hans Jonas (see later.) The story of Abraham and Isaac on the mount Moria is seen after the Shoa in other dimensions: Isaac as a survivor, like the survivors of the Holocaust, had to come back to life after the horrible experience. The promise to Abraham after the *Aqeda* applies to all descendants of Isaac, and so also to the Jews who experienced the attempt of their complete destruction. To rabbi Edward van Voolen it is clear that there could be no sense and guilt found in the tragedy of Holocaust: *'To live on without any answer, without any theology of sacrifice (Brandopfer*²⁷²). *Isaac was able to transform his suffering into prayer, into a weave of texts and questions and cautious answers and new questions again. [...] Nevertheless, he did not retire into prayer and meditation, he did not break with the society, he did not refuse the life. [...] The liturgy can be useful, can help us to ask, to look for answers in often conflicting traditions.*²⁷³ According to Abraham Joshua Heschel the formation of the state of Israel is not a reconciliation (it would be a blasphemy to see it like that), but it makes the life of the Jews after Holocaust less unbearable.²⁷⁴

In conclusion, I would like to summarise and characterize shortly some important understandings of suffering in Judaism. There are many interrelations.

²⁶⁵ Cf. M. BUBER: *Góg és Magóg*.

²⁶⁶ Cf. O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 165f.

²⁶⁷ Cf. R. RUBINSTEIN's works *After Auschwitz* and *Approaches to Auschwitz*; O. LEAMAN, p. 186f.

²⁶⁸ O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 188f.

²⁶⁹ Sanctifying the Name (the maintenance of faith and its proclamation even in the most dire circumstances)

²⁷⁰ the Talmudic expression is *hester panim* – (God) hiding His face

²⁷¹ Berkovits sees the reason of God's hiddenness in his concern for the freedom and responsibility of man. The creation is possible because of the self-limitation of God and it means a risk. *'Therefore the problem of God's providence and justice must forever remain unsolved in history, so as to enable the possibility of history itself, and of life's increasing orientation to God, through human responsibility.'* E. BERKOVITS: *God, Man and History*, p. 150; Cf. p. 82f; O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 191; Cf. MOLTMANN: *'Die Grube': - 'Wo war Gott?'*, in: *Als Gott weinte* (M. Görg, M. Langer Hg.), p. 50.

²⁷² The word Holocaust itself refers to the burnt offering (Brandopfer).

²⁷³ *'Ein Weiterleben ohne Antwort, ohne Theologie des Brandopfers. Isaak wusste sein Leiden in Gebet umzusetzen, in ein Gewebe von Texten und Fragen und vorsichtigen Antworten und wieder neuen Fragen (...) Dennoch zog er sich nicht völlig in Gebet und Meditation zurück, er brach nicht mit der Gesellschaft, er wehrte sich nicht gegen das Leben.(...) Die Liturgie kann uns dabei dienlich sein, kann uns helfen zu fragen, Antworten zu suchen in oft widerstreitenden Traditionen.'* Cited by R. SCHMITZ, in A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 197; (W. ZUDEIMA (Hg.): *Isaak wird wieder geopfert*, Neukirchen Vluyn 1987, p. 65.)

²⁷⁴ Cf. HESCHEL: *Israel, an Echo of Eternity*, cited in A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 184.

1. Suffering as (purging) punishment, as judgement of sin²⁷⁵ (act-and-consequence connection). The retribution of the wicked could be delayed, it will nevertheless take place.²⁷⁶ Although Judaism speaks about the *hachet hakadmon* (first or primeval sin), but it emphasises that the soul the man gets from God is originally clean, and the man spoils his soul by his own guilt. Although he fails again and again, the chance of conversion and fulfilment is always open for him.²⁷⁷ One may speak not only about individual, but also about collective guilt. The election of Israel is a demand, and the unfaithfulness of the people to the covenant leads to perishing (see f. e. Dt 30:15f). Nevertheless, there is an orientation in the Jewish act-and-consequence theodicy: not the punishment and judgement, but God's forgiveness and mercy have the last word. The chosen people are chastised, but never fully rejected or abolished.²⁷⁸ Suffering purges and the punishment serves the conversion of the sinner. The exile was often seen as a result of the guilt of the Jewish people or their leaders and as a possibility of cleansing from sins. There is a Jewish assertion that the ultimate salvation would come to the world, if even only one day long the whole Israel repented and converted.²⁷⁹ However, the act-and-consequence connection was questioned often in the Jewish tradition²⁸⁰ and very profoundly in the 20th century. For the non-Jews it is important to remember that this view can never be imposed from outside on the Jewish people: this is a way of self-understanding of their own sufferings.

2. Suffering as a test. Suffering serves to probe and strengthen the belief of the just. The cause of Job's suffering is seen in the prologue of the book as a test. An important example is the radical test of Abraham's belief and obedience in Genesis 22.²⁸¹ Abraham accepts voluntarily the suffering which comes from God, as well as Isaac accepts his suffering.²⁸² They anticipate the type of the suffering servant.

3. Suffering as atonement. The act-and-consequence connection, the judgement of sins is present in a special way in this view: the just bears the sins of the others and atones for it.²⁸³ The atoning animal sacrifice is a precedent for this understanding.²⁸⁴ The (sacrificial) binding of Isaac - *Aqedat Jizchak* - was in the Jewish tradition understood also as a once-for-all completed act of atonement for the whole Israel.²⁸⁵ Isaac himself was also seen as the one representing Israel.²⁸⁶ The suffering servant of

²⁷⁵ Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 24.

²⁷⁶ Cf. Proverb 24:19f or Psalm 37; BOWKER, p. 15.

²⁷⁷ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 36.

²⁷⁸ Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 45.

²⁷⁹ A. LOICHINGER, A: KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 184; there is a similar Hasidic assertion: if the whole Israel kept the Shabbat, the Messiah would come to the world.

²⁸⁰ From the Hebrew Bible see f. e. Eccles. 8:14 and especially the Book of Job; Cf. BOWKER, p. 16f.

²⁸¹ Schalom Ben-Chorin emphasises that obedience as well as love are tested (obedience without love would be just a blind slavish obedience). SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 43; A. LOICHINGER, A: KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 185.

²⁸² According to the rabbinic tradition Isaac was already around 30 years old, so he could have easily resisted his father. The Aggadah tells that the angels started to weep over the suffering of Isaac and their tears fell in his eyes, causing the blindness the Bible talks about at the end of Isaac's life. Schalom Ben-Chorin sees in this story the hint that even Isaac's suffering on the mount Moria could not have been simply undone. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 42.

²⁸³ A. LOICHINGER, A: KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 185.

²⁸⁴ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 46.

²⁸⁵ - recalled every year in the liturgy of the New Year. R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A: KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 191.

Isaiah 53 was identified in Judaism mainly with Israel in the exile or the whole people of Israel.²⁸⁷ This view is related to the understanding of martyrdom: martyrdom could be viewed as atonement for the sins of the world. The atoning suffering can be seen in messianic sense too.

4. Suffering as many times an inevitable part of the witness to God; suffering as martyrdom. In this case, suffering itself is not justified, but it arises from the contradiction between the world and God's people. The opposition between worldly powers and God is strongly expressed especially in the apocalyptic literature. Genesis 22 provides examples of martyrdom too: the binding of Isaac by Abraham is seen as the sacrifice of the most precious gift to God, which is an example for the sacrifice of one's own life in faithfulness to God. Isaac himself is also understood as the first martyr. God's name is sanctified (*Kiddush ha-Schem*) through the witness and holiness of God's people.

5. Suffering as sign of the coming of the Messianic time (the labour pains of the coming of the Messiah), and the messianic sense of suffering. On one hand suffering is a judgement on the world, and just before the coming of Messiah the evil may raise in the world. On the other hand the suffering of the just is seen as a test, atonement and martyrdom. In Judaism there exists the idea of the suffering Messiah ben Joseph who has to die to atone for the sins of the world, before the victorious Messiah ben David comes. Judaism does not see his atonement exclusively - there are many suffering servants of God, resp. the suffering servant is understood collectively.²⁸⁸ Suffering receives here a messianic dignity.²⁸⁹ In the time of salvation there will be no more suffering. There are two reasons which are delaying the end-time of salvation: on the one hand the deficient obedience to the Torah and insufficient willingness to repentance, on the other hand the ruling powers of the world opposing the lordship of God.²⁹⁰

6. Suffering as a cry and open question to God, and the tradition of the protest and fighting with God (in jiddish *krign sich mit Got*). In the Bible especially the Book of Job and the lamenting Psalms are examples of this attitude.²⁹¹ The quarrelling and arguing with God is present also in the *Midrashim*, in the *Piyyutim* (religious poems), later especially in the tales of the Hasidim. The quarrelling with God may happen even in the form of a legal speech (see later by Elie Wiesel).

Suffering itself stays even in most of the previously mentioned views not fully understandable: why does God allow it, or why does God allow evil in the first place? No God can change the tears and the cry of the tormented into the Hallelujah of His angels – writes Schalom Ben-Chorin.²⁹² As a consequence of Jewish monotheism, God cannot be relieved from the responsibility, even if there are powers aversive to God in the world. The God of the Bible is besides all the revelations also a

²⁸⁶ R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 191.

²⁸⁷ The Jewish tradition (in spite of the Christian) preserved predominantly the collective understanding of the songs about the servant of God in the Book of Isaiah. Rashi, Joseph Caro and David Kimchi all refer to the Knesseth-Israel. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 68, 47; R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 191.

²⁸⁸ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 72, Cf. p. 69.

²⁸⁹ Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 52.

²⁹⁰ R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 193.

²⁹¹ concerning the interpretations of Job's experience see pp.79f.

²⁹² SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 31.

hidden God,²⁹³ who is ultimately not fully understandable by humans and whose reasons may stay hidden. However, He is the Creator, who is touched by the suffering of His people and creatures (and even suffers with them),²⁹⁴ and who promises His judgement and salvation. Especially the Jewish mysticism and Hasidism speak about the suffering *Shekhina* till the coming of Messiah and final salvation. For the Jews the state of the world is fully unredeemed but not without mercy and hope.²⁹⁵

From the practical point of view, the Jewish answer on suffering is very ethical (besides all the mentioned different understandings). After man's alienation the creation lost its original goodness and the new order after the big Flood is not the same as it was in the beginning, but Israel got the Torah which shows the way to God and leads to *Shalom*. The chosenness of Israel is understood as a collective responsibility.²⁹⁶ The Torah and God's commandments are of central importance in Judaism. Already Maimonides tended to stress the idea that God's influence on the world was not so much the influence of a person but more the influence of a law.²⁹⁷ A Mitzvah (commandment) is a prayer in the form of an act, and though the deeds of humans cannot heal the history and lead to salvation, it is the obedience to God that makes us worthy to be redeemed by Him – writes Abraham Joshua Heschel.²⁹⁸ According to Emmanuel Levinas, the essential meaning of Judaism lies in ethics: *'The way that leads to God therefore leads ipso facto – and not in addition – to man.'*²⁹⁹ As Heschel puts it, the love to the others is the way to the love of God.³⁰⁰ Like the Creator cares for his creatures,³⁰¹ the man should show consideration for the animals too: for instance, the man should help even on Shabbat the suffering animals, like the heavily loaded pack animals, to alleviate their pain.³⁰²

It is clear for many Jewish thinkers, like Shalom Ben-Chorin, that the problem of theodicy is ultimately unresolvable and all the theories may fail in the face of the dread.³⁰³ The understanding stops before such horrible disasters as the Holocaust was. How can one relate to God and think of

²⁹³ Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 41.

²⁹⁴ Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 53.

²⁹⁵ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 54.

²⁹⁶ Cf. R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 188.

²⁹⁷ O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 205.

²⁹⁸ *'Was ist eine Mizwa? Ein Gebet im Gewand des Tuns. Und beten heißt, Seine Gegenwart spüren.'* *'Gute Taten allein können die Geschichte nicht heilen, erst der Gehorsam gegen Gott macht uns wert, von Gott zu werden.'* *'Aufgabe des Menschen ist, die Welt erlösungswürdig zu machen. Sein Glaube und seine Werke sind Vorbereitungen auf die endgültige Erlösung.'* A. J. HESCHEL: *Gott sucht den Menschen*, p. 289; p. 292-293.

²⁹⁹ *'Der Weg, der zu Gott führt, führt deswegen ipso facto – und nicht bloß zusätzlich – zum Menschen; und der Weg, der zum Menschen führt, führt uns zurück zu rituellen Maßnahmen und zur Selbsterziehung.'* E. LEVINAS: *Difficult Freedom*, cited by O. LEAMAN: *Hiob und das Leid: Ursprung des Bösen, Leiden Gottes und Überwindung des Bösen im talmudischen und kabbalistischen Judentum*, in: P. KOSLOWSKI (Hrsg.): *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 124; Cf. p.122.

³⁰⁰ *'Ohne Ehrfurcht vor dem Mitmenschen gibt es keine Ehrfurcht vor Gott. Die Liebe zum Mitmenschen ist der Weg zur Gottesliebe.'* A. J. HESCHEL: *Gott sucht den Menschen*, p. 289.

³⁰¹ Cf. R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 199.

³⁰² R. SCHMITZ: *Das Leiden und das Böse. Antwortversuche im Judentum*, in A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 199; Cf. Babylonian Talmud, tractate Shabbath 128b: http://www.come-and-hear.com/shabbath/shabbath_128.html

³⁰³ Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, pp. 32, 25.

Him after Auschwitz? I have chosen two very different attempts of coming to terms with this reality: Hans Jonas, who lost his mother in the Shoah, and Elie Wiesel, a survivor of the concentration camps.

God at Risk and the Responsibility of Humans – Hans Jonas

*‘Having given himself whole to the becoming world,
God has no more to give: it is man’s now to give him.’³⁰⁴*

Hans Jonas delivered a lecture in 1984 in Tübingen on the occasion of receiving the Dr. Leopold Lucas Prize with the title *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz. Eine jüdische Stimme (The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice)*. It is the common fate of Hans Jonas’ mother and the donor’s father (Rabbi Leopold Lucas) and mother dying in the concentration camps that caused the philosopher Hans Jonas to choose the theme: *‘I chose it with fear and trembling. But I believed I owed it to those shadows that something like an answer to their long-gone cry to a silent God be not denied to them.’³⁰⁵*

Hans Jonas was born in Germany in 1903, in 1933 he moved to Palestine and later in his life to North America. His way of thinking leads from the German existentialism and antic religious history (especially the research of Gnosis³⁰⁶), through an anti-existentialist ontology of the organic, to an ethics of ecological responsibility, and finally to an attempt of a concept of God after Auschwitz.³⁰⁷ According to his own self-reflexion, he recognizes a tension between being a Jew and being a philosopher.³⁰⁸ In his book *Das Prinzip der Verantwortung* he tries to establish an ethics of responsibility, consciously without any theological argumentation.³⁰⁹ However, he saw in Judaism an ethical and theological potential and strength which could help to maintain the dignity of life and human existence. As he writes in a later work, a hidden motive of his thinking is the liturgical predicate of God called *rozeh bachajim* (‘who wills life’), which from the human side means responsibility and respect for the worth of life and resistance against its destruction.³¹⁰ A guiding principle in Hans Jonas’ philosophy is his fight against the nihilistic world negation, the indifference towards the nature and the ethical irresponsibility in the time of technological power.³¹¹ One has to read Jonas’ theological speculations in the context of his emphasis on the ethical responsibility towards creation. Jonas’ plea is for a sober hope which gives rise to responsible action: *‘So at the end*

³⁰⁴ HANS JONAS: *The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice*, in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Jan., 1987), p. 12. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/1203313?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

³⁰⁵ HANS JONAS (Ibid.), p. 1; HANS JONAS: *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz. Eine jüdische Stimme*, p. 7.

³⁰⁶ HANS JONAS: *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*

³⁰⁷ Cf. CH. WIESE: »Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«, in: *Prinzip Zukunft: Im Dialog mit Hans Jonas* (R. SEIDEL, M. ENDRUWEIT Hrsg.), p. 73; CH. WIESE: *Gegen Weltverzweiflung und Weltangst*, in: *Mensch-Gott-Welt*, p. 243f.

³⁰⁸ Cf. CH. WIESE: »Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«, in: *Prinzip Zukunft: Im Dialog mit Hans Jonas* (R. SEIDEL, M. ENDRUWEIT Hrsg.), p. 72; 91.

³⁰⁹ CH. WIESE: »Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«, in: *Prinzip Zukunft: Im Dialog mit Hans Jonas* (R. SEIDEL, M. ENDRUWEIT Hrsg.), p. 75.

³¹⁰ HANS JONAS: *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung*. Frankfurt a. M., 1988, p. 57; referred to in CH. WIESE: »Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«, in *Prinzip Zukunft: Im Dialog mit Hans Jonas* (R. SEIDEL, M. ENDRUWEIT Hrsg.), p. 74; Cf. CH. WIESE: *Gegen Weltverzweiflung und Weltangst*, in *Mensch-Gott-Welt*, p. 259.

³¹¹ Cf. CH. WIESE: *Gegen Weltverzweiflung und Weltangst*, in *Mensch-Gott-Welt*, p. 253f.

*the principle of responsibility and the principle of hope come together – not any more the excessive hope for an earthly paradise, but the more humble hope for the continued habitability of the world and for the humane existence of the mankind on its entrusted (surely not poor, but limited) heritage.*³¹²

Hans Jonas calls his *Concept of God after Auschwitz* a piece of speculative theology,³¹³ knowing that ultimately only with presumptions it is possible to answer such questions. Without the goal of knowledge, Hans Jonas strives for understanding in terms of sense and meaning. At the end of his essay he admits that the answers to Job's question are like stammering before the eternal mystery. *'Mine is opposite to the one given by the Book of Job: this, for an answer, invoked the plenitude of God's power; mine, his chosen voidance of it. And yet, strange to say, both are in praise'*³¹⁴

The fact that 'Auschwitz' did happen causes Hans Jonas to rethink the concept of God and the relation of the divine to man. The old theological categories do not seem any more adequate. The belief in the Lord of history, who is just and merciful, seems fundamentally questioned. The traditional answers fail in the face of Auschwitz: one cannot speak simply about guilt and punishment, neither about the unfaithfulness of Israel, nor about trial, witness or sanctifying God's name (*Kiddush-hashem*).

Hans Jonas presents a myth (sketched already in the 1960's) - a cosmological speculation, which refers to some kabbalistic motives, but radicalizes them. The Lurianic Kabbalah speaks about the self-contraction of God called *Tzimtzum* in order to give space for the creation. In Jonas' myth God contracts himself totally and gives up his omnipotence. He gives himself up into the unconditional immanence: *'no uncommitted or unimpaired part remained to direct, correct, and ultimately guarantee the devious working-out of its destiny in creation.'* *'Rather, in order that the world might be, and be for itself, God renounced his being, devastating himself of his deity – to receive it back from the Odyssey of time weighted with the chance harvest of unforeseeable temporal experience: transfigured or possibly even disfigured by it.'*³¹⁵ In the process of evolution, the divine ground comes to experience and discover himself in the variety and surprises of the world-adventure.³¹⁶ The non-human creatures *'by merely fulfilling themselves in pursuit of their lives, vindicate the divine adventure. Even their suffering deepens the fullness of the symphony. Thus, this side of good and evil, God cannot lose in the great evolutionary game.'*³¹⁷ However, the advent of man means a threshold in the divine adventure: the previous innocence of creation is lost and the human freedom is accompanied by the charge of responsibility under the disjunction of good and evil. The acts of the humans have decisive impact on the fate of eternity itself: the image of God may be completed, saved or spoiled by what the man does to himself and to the world. *'With the appearance of man,*

³¹² *'So kommt am Ende doch das Prinzip Verantwortung mit dem Prinzip Hoffnung zusammen – nicht mehr die überschwengliche Hoffnung auf ein irdisches Paradies, aber die bescheidenere auf eine Weiterwohnlichkeit der Welt und ein menschenwürdiges Fortleben unserer Gattung auf dem ihr anvertrauten, gewiss nicht armseligen, aber doch beschränkten Erbe.'* H. JONAS: *Technik, Freiheit und Pflicht*. In: H. JONAS: *Wissenschaft als persönliches Erlebnis*, Göttingen 1987, p. 46; cited by CH. WIESE: »Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 92.

³¹³ H. JONAS: *The Concept of God after Auschwitz*, p. 1.

³¹⁴ H. JONAS (Ibid.), p. 13.

³¹⁵ H. JONAS, p. 4.

³¹⁶ H. JONAS, p. 5.

³¹⁷ H. JONAS, p. 5.

*transcendence awakened to itself and hence-forth accompanies his doings with the bated breath of suspense, hoping and beckoning, rejoicing and grieving, approving and frowning – and, I daresay, making itself felt to him even while not intervening in the dynamics of his worldly scene: for can it not be that by the reflection of its own state as it wavers with the record of man, the transcendent casts light and shadow over the human landscape?*³¹⁸

Hans Jonas sketched the myth many years earlier in a lecture about *'Immortality and the Modern Temper'*,³¹⁹ where it stands in a context of anti-nihilistic reflections about the sense of human life. He speaks there about the transcendental meaning of the human actions: the human acts enter into the forming image of the becoming God, who surrendered himself into the darkness and risk of the process of evolution, and His face emerges slowly in the experiences of time.³²⁰ The human responsibility applies not only to the life of creation, but it affects also the fate of the divine.³²¹

The God presented by Hans Jonas is a suffering, becoming, caring and *not* omnipotent God. We know also from the Bible that God is grieving over the creation and laments over His people. He is affected by the happenings in the world and cares for His creatures. However, Hans Jonas radicalizes these biblical experiences. That God is affected by the happenings of time means to Hans Jonas that He is made different. Eternity grows *'with the accumulating harvest of time.'*³²² Hans Jonas emphasises that unlike Christianity his myth does not speak about a unique incarnation of God in a special time of history or about a particular situation of suffering with a special aim, but about a suffering of God from the moment of creation, certainly from the creation of man.³²³ He cares for His creation, but He is not a sorcerer: He has left something for other agents to do and made His care dependent on them. Even more, He is an *'endangered God, a God who runs a risk.'* *'Somehow he has, by an act of either inscrutable wisdom or love or whatever else the divine motive may have been, forgone the guaranteeing of his self-satisfaction by his own power, after he has first, by the act of creation itself, forgone being »all in all«*³²⁴

As Hans Jonas himself recognizes it, perhaps the most critical point in his theological speculation is the suggestion that God is not omnipotent. He points out that on the logical plane the idea of absolute power is self-contradictory and senseless: power cancels itself out if it does not have any limitation and object on which to act. Power has to be a relational concept: it must be divided so that there be any power at all. From the three theodicy-attributes of God: goodness, intelligibility and omnipotence, it is the last one which according to Jonas shows itself the most problematic and needs to fall out. Goodness is inalienable from the concept of God. Intelligibility is conditional and limited, but its complete elimination would result in a profoundly un-Jewish concept of God.³²⁵ Contrary to

³¹⁸ H. JONAS, p. 5.

³¹⁹ H. JONAS: *Immortality and the Modern Temper. The Ingersoll Lecture 1961*, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Jan., 1962), pp. 1-20; in German: H. JONAS: *Unsterblichkeit und heutige Existenz*, in H. JONAS: *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit*, Göttingen 1963, p. 55ff.

³²⁰ The motive of the transcendental image which arises from our worldly acts is a Gnostic motif. Hans Jonas uses the symbolic inspired by this Gnostic motif against any 'gnostical' world negation and against ethical indifference. Cf. CH. WIESE: *»Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 89.

³²¹ CH. WIESE: *»Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 89.

³²² H. JONAS, p. 7.

³²³ Cf. the comparison of incarnation in letters between R. Bultmann and H. Jonas, in: H. JONAS: *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit*, Göttingen 1963, p. 68f.

³²⁴ H. JONAS, p. 8.

³²⁵ H. JONAS, p. 9.

other Jewish traditions which speak about a partial self-limitation of God (see e.g. the Kabbalah), according to Hans Jonas the self-contraction of God is not revocable and it is total as far as power is concerned: *'the Infinite ceded his power to the finite and thereby wholly delivered his cause into its hands.'*³²⁶ Otherwise there could be no excuse for God being silent in the case of Auschwitz. *'Not because he chose not to, but because he could not intervene did he fail to intervene. For reasons decisively prompted by contemporary experience, I entertain the idea of a God who for a time – the time of the ongoing world process – has divested himself of any power to interfere with the physical course of things; and who responds to the impact on his being by worldly events, not »with a mighty hand and outstretched arm,« as we Jews on every Passover recite in remembering the exodus from Egypt, but with the mutely insistent appeal of his unfulfilled goal.'*³²⁷

*'Having given himself whole to the becoming world, God has no more to give: it is man's now to give to him.'*³²⁸ Hans Jonas refers to the thirty-six righteous ones from the Jewish tradition (mentioned in the Talmud and appearing mostly in more mystical branches of Judaism, like Hasidism³²⁹) whom the world shall never lack in order not to come to end: *'their hidden holiness can outweigh countless guilt, redress the balance of a generation, and secure the peace of the invisible realm.'*³³⁰ Also the traditional concept of the *tikkun olam* (the ability and task of men to help to perfect and repair the world) may be hidden behind Jonas' philosophical reflections, but in a much more radicalised form and without any messianic dimension from the side of God.³³¹ By Hans Jonas God accompanies the actions of men by his mutely insistent appeal and by suffering together with the creation, but He can not intervene. The fate of the creation and of God lies in the hands of men.³³²

However, Hans Jonas' last words imply that God is still a counterpart to whom it has meaning to pray. His last words are a witness to God who is worthy of praise: he hopes his poor words can be a praise for God, citing Goethe's verse: *'All that ever stammers praising the Most High / Is in circles there assembled far and nigh.'*³³³

Some critical remarks

The quest for understanding has essential importance for being able to live as humans.³³⁴ One could point out the limits of human understanding, but Hans Jonas knows about them and he emphasises the speculative character of his reflections. The problem could be how far his reflections are coherent and consequent. Another question is whether his answer could be a practical one for those in the situation of dread and suffering.

³²⁶ H. JONAS, p. 12.

³²⁷ H. JONAS, p. 10-11; Cf. German edition (*Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*), p. 42: *„der dem Aufprall des weltlichen Geschehens auf sein eigens Sein antwortet nicht »mit starker Hand und ausgestrecktem Arm,« wie wir Juden alljährlich im Gedenken an den Auszug aus Egypten rezitieren, sondern mit dem eindringlich-stummen Werben seines unerfüllten Zieles.'*

³²⁸ H. JONAS, p. 12.

³²⁹ *Tzadikim nistarim*, Babylonian Talmud tractate Sanhedrin 97b and Sukkah 45b (http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_97.html#PARTb)

³³⁰ *„[...] und den Frieden des unsichtbaren Reiches zu retten.'* H. JONAS, p. 12; German edition, p. 48.

³³¹ Cf. CH. WIESE: *»Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 85.

³³² Cf. CH. WIESE: *Gegen Weltverzweiflung und Weltangst*, in: *Mensch-Gott-Welt*, p. 263-264.

³³³ H. JONAS, p. 13; Cf. H. H. HENRIX: *Machtenstagung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft: Im Dialog mit Hans Jonas*, p. 110.

³³⁴ Cf. H. H. HENRIX: *Machtentsagung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 110.

Already before Hans Jonas, the Christian Jürgen Moltmann interprets creation by taking up the Jewish-Kabbalistic notion of the Tzimtzum and speaks about a self-withdrawal of God. The powerful creation is to be thought as a self-humiliation of God into His own powerlessness and taking on suffering in His love.³³⁵ However, traditional Christian theology understands creation as a powerful and free act of the Creator, who in His love and goodness lets the creation (the other from himself) participate on the fullness of His life. The understanding of creation as 'passio Dei' is a thought alien to the Old Testament.³³⁶ By Hans Jonas creation is a one-time happening at the beginning of time, giving rise to the process of evolution. However, already the Tzimtzum could be understood as an always happening process.³³⁷ The Christian understanding of creation includes also the *creatio continua* (continuous creation): the Creator gives and holds on life in every moment of our existence.

The relation of transcendence and immanence is not clear by Jonas. He suggests a total self-contraction of God into the unconditional immanence: 'as a whole has the Infinite ceded his power to the finite'. He has to ask the question: 'Does that still leave anything for a relation to God?'³³⁸ It seems that transcendence is totally dissolved in the immanence. However, God accompanies the worldly events with a 'mutely insistent appeal'.³³⁹ How can this appeal exist if transcendence is fully dismissed? How can transcendence emerge again from the total immanence? The Jewish tradition speaks about God who bends down to the needy and at the same time dwells in the high and holy place (see e. g. Psalm 113: 5-7, Isaiah 57:15). Transcendence and immanence are in the Jewish theology rather inseparable and each one a condition for the other.³⁴⁰ Hans Jonas writes: 'But no saving miracle occurred. Through the years that »Auschwitz« raged God remained silent. The miracles that did occur came forth from man alone: the deeds of those solitary, mostly unknown »just of the nations« [...].'³⁴¹ According to Jonas some of these 'just of the nations' could belong to the 'thirty-six righteous ones' known from the Jewish tradition, whose hidden holiness rescues the peace of the invisible realm.³⁴² Is it possible to understand the acts of these righteous ones as the echo of God's mutely insistent appeal? Could one say that God spoke through these people and was present in their holiness?

The accent by Hans Jonas does not lie so much on the acquittal of God, but more on the emphasis of the human responsibility.³⁴³ Jonas transforms the complaint about God's silence into a question of anthropodicy.³⁴⁴ The fate of the divine is in the hands of humans. The speculation about the

³³⁵ Cf. J. MOLTSMANN: *Trinität und Reich Gottes. Zur Gotteslehre*. München 1980, p. 124f; Cf. H. H. HENRICH: *Machtentsagung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 105.

³³⁶ Cf. *Handbuch der Dogmatik 1* (Hrsg. TH. SCHNEIDER), p. 209; Cf. W. GROSS, K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Bûh a zlo*, p. 170f.

³³⁷ Cf. CH. WIESE: »Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 86.

³³⁸ H. JONAS, p. 12.

³³⁹ *das eindringlich-stumme Werben seines unerfüllten Zieles*, H. JONAS: *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, p. 42; H. JONAS, p. 11.

³⁴⁰ Cf. Elie Wiesel's words: 'Without transcendence immanence has no sense, as well as transcendence without immanence has no sense at all.' (M. de SAINT CHERON: *ELIE WIESEL. Zlo a exil*; p. 106) See also the Christian dogmatics: transcendence is a condition for God's immanence, and in His immanence God remains transcendent (the ground for existence, different from the particular beings), Cf. *Handbuch der Dogmatik 1* (Hrsg. TH. SCHNEIDER), p. 210.

³⁴¹ H. JONAS, p. 10.

³⁴² H. JONAS: *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz*, p. 48; H. JONAS, p. 12.

³⁴³ H. H. HENRICH: *Machtentsagung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 94, Cf. CH. WIESE's Afterword to Hans Jonas' *Erinnerungen*, Leipzig 2003, p. 419.

³⁴⁴ CH. WIESE: »Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 82.

powerless God makes the human responsibility towards life even more pressing. However, the question is whether the concept of God's radical powerlessness and dependence on the human actions does not demand a too high price leading into despair and hopelessness.³⁴⁵ Another question could be whether the mutely insistent appeal of God by Hans Jonas does not remain in the realm of aesthetics rather than ethics. Simone Weil once said: *'The time is the waiting of God, who is begging for our love.'* Emmanuel Levinas corrected this statement spontaneously: *'(The time is the waiting of God), who demands our love.'*³⁴⁶

Hans Jonas can think of God and Auschwitz together only at the price of giving up God's omnipotence and the belief in the God with *'mighty hand and outstretched arm.'* There happens too much horror and atrocity in the world and it would be dreadful to see everything as the intention of God.³⁴⁷ Hans Jonas wants to hold on to God's goodness and understandability and therefore he explains the evil by putting the responsibility totally on humans: *'from the hearts of men alone does it arise and gain power in the world.'*³⁴⁸ I consider Hans Jonas' emphasis on God's goodness very important. However, I find his explanation concerning God's goodness and understandability problematic. I would question the goodness of a God who gives himself up into the risk of evolution and human freedom. Does goodness not include the responsibility for one's actions too? Why could God not create a world without His total self-restriction, in order to be able to lead it to an end which does not carry the risk of total failure? The ground for God's self-restriction is not explained by Jonas: *'Somehow he has, by an act of inscrutable wisdom or love or whatever else the divine motive may have been, forgone the guaranteeing of his self-satisfaction by his own power, after he has first, by the act of creation itself, forgone being »all in all.«'*³⁴⁹ Hans Jonas knows about the limits of human understanding and the speculative character of his own explanations and I think his essay leads rather to the recognition of our inability to understand God beyond His revelation. Hans Jonas' philosophical quest for understanding is very important. I think in theology we should be more cautious not to 'explain away' what cannot be grasped and where the Bible itself does not give full explanation. Only then can we keep the belief and hope in the God of Exodus and can we have the strength to fight against evil, without giving up when facing the cruelty of men.

It is worthy to compare Hans Jonas' conception with the more orthodox thought of Eliezer Berkovits. The main difference is the insistence on God's ultimate responsibility and the messianic promise. According to Berkovits, God took a risk with creation by granting it freedom. Creation is an act of self-limitation of God. Failure is always a possibility, but it cannot be fatal to the purpose of the Creator whose ultimate responsibility is a guarantee of final success.³⁵⁰ Freedom and choice make ethical

³⁴⁵ Cf. CH. WIESE: *»Weltabenteuer Gottes« und »Heiligkeit des Lebens«*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 84.

³⁴⁶ *'Die Zeit ist das Warten Gottes, der um unsere Liebe bittet'* (S. WEIL); *'(Die Zeit ist das Warten Gottes), der unsere Liebe befiehlt'* (H. H. HENRIX). Cited by H. H. HENRIX: *Machtentsagung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 106.

³⁴⁷ Cf. H. JONAS: *Wissenschaft und persönliches Erlebnis*, Göttingen 1987, p. 67; Cf. H. H. HENRIX: *Machtentsagung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p.109.

³⁴⁸ H. JONAS, p. 11.

Hans Jonas does not speak about the natural evil, but it could be consequent to Hans Jonas' thought to understand natural evil as the Christian dogmatist Gisbert Greshake explains it: the evolutionary process is a preliminary form of the God-given freedom to the world. Evolution contains a playful trial of different possibilities, and so carries the risk of failures and negative 'by-products', which result in suffering. Cf. G. GRESHAKE, p. 44-46.

³⁴⁹ H. JONAS, p. 8.

³⁵⁰ E. BERKOVITS: *God, Man and History*, p. 79, 83.

actions possible. History is man's responsibility, where God does not manifestly intervene. *'For the sake of man, God cannot evidently interfere in the course of history, for such intervention would completely crush man's moral independence and responsibility. As the prophet said of him: »He will be silent in his love.« The very silence of God in history is due to his concern for man.'*³⁵¹ *Man is responsible to the extent to which he is free; God is responsible to the extent to which he has made man free and sustains man in freedom.*³⁵² The messianic final salvation is promised by God, but the path to it must be blazed by man and the time required to reach it will depend on him. The Talmud says: *'They will not be redeemed unless they return.'*³⁵³

In the Christian tradition the all-powerfulness of God is understood as the all-powerfulness of His love. The Cross problematizes the simple metaphysical understanding of God's omnipotence and apathy.³⁵⁴ We may find similar thoughts to Hans Jonas' conception in some Christian theologies, especially by the mentioned Jürgen Moltmann or in the American process theology (God running a risk).³⁵⁵ In contemporary, more traditional Christian theologies there are interpretations of God's power as the power and powerlessness of His love. According to the Roman-Catholic Dogmatist Gisbert Greshake God's omnipotence is the power of His love which gives place and freedom for the creation. Only freedom makes love possible. Suffering is the price of this God-given freedom. God enters this world of suffering and transforms the suffering through His love.³⁵⁶ The Dominican Johannes B. Brantschen writes that we experience the powerlessness of God's love as God's silence or God's discretion. The all-powerful God is powerless as long as we do not answer with free hearts to his love and He suffers until we do not understand His love.³⁵⁷ However, how could God in His love allow such horrible things to happen like the Holocaust, just because He respects the human freedom? What is true human freedom? If God is powerless and not responsible, can we still ask Him to deliver us from evil? Beyond our inability to grasp the mystery of evil and suffering, I think it is important not to give up the trust in the powerful love of God which transcends the human possibilities. As Emmanuel Levinas says, God's defencelessness costs too many suffering people: *'Sometimes it seems to me there could be a sense for what happened in Auschwitz, as if the loving God demanded a love which is without any promise. That means: tout-à-fait gratuity. And then I say to myself: but this costs too much – not for God, but for the people. This is my critic, my incomprehension of the defencelessness. This powerless kenosis costs people too much.'*³⁵⁸ The all-

³⁵¹ E. BERKOVITS: *God, Man and History*, p. 147f; quotation from the Bible: Zephaniah 3:17.

³⁵² E. BERKOVITS: *God, Man and History*, p. 151.

³⁵³ Sanhedrin 97b. BERKOVITS, p. 158.

³⁵⁴ Cf. EBERHARD JÜNGEL, cited by W. GROSS, K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Bûh a zlo*, p. 157.

³⁵⁵ A closer similarity we can find in the process theology, Cf. *Handbuch der Dogmatik 1* (Hrsg. TH. SCHNEIDER), p. 108.

³⁵⁶ G. GRESHAKE: *Der Preis der Liebe*, p. 33-35, 54, 57, 71; W. GROSS, K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Bûh a zlo*, p. 164-165.

³⁵⁷ *'Das ist das Unerhörte: Gott, der souveräne Herr des Himmels und der Erde, bettelt um unsere Liebe, aber der allmächtige Gott ist ohnmächtig, solange wir nicht aus freiem Herzen auf seine zuvorkommende Liebe antworten – denn Liebe ohne Freiheit bleibt ein hölzernes Eisen. Diese Ohnmacht der Liebe empfinden wir heute als Schweigen Gottes oder vielleicht besser: als Diskretion Gottes. [...] Gott leidet, so lange seine Liebe nicht verstanden wird. [...] Dieses Warten ist Gottes Schmerz.'* J.B. BRANTSCHEN: *Die Macht und Ohnmacht der Liebe. Randglossen zum dogmatischen Satz: Gott ist veränderlich*. In: *FZPhTh* 27 (1980). p. 238f; cited by H. H. HENRIX: *Machtentsagung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 106.

³⁵⁸ *'Manchmal scheint mir das, was in Auschwitz passiert ist, einen Sinn zu haben, als ob der liebe Gott eine Liebe verlangt, die ganz ohne Versprechen ist. Das denke ich mir so. Der Sinn von Auschwitz ist ein Leiden, ein Glauben ganz ohne Versprechen. Das heißt: tout-à-fait gratuit. Und dann sage ich mir: aber das kostet doch zuviel – nicht den lieben Gott, sondern die Menschheit. Das ist meine Kritik, mein Unverständnis gegenüber der*

powerfulness of God awakes our longing for it. Levinas speaks about an 'intrigue' of the omnipotent God: the all-powerfulness of God gives rise to a longing and movement which at the moment of need seems to turn to our fellow human beings and awakes our responsibility for them. The omnipotent God commands us to our neighbour. The 'intrigue' of God would be a self-limitation which calls us for limitless ethical responsibility towards others.³⁵⁹ Levinas' reflections are an example of an ethics grounded on the belief and longing for the all-powerful God. God's powerfulness is a hope also for the sufferers of the past and for the dead. God's revelation as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Exodus and the Father of Jesus Christ keeps up the light of the humble hope in face of the cruel reality, not letting us sink into despair.

The Night and The Trial of God – Elie Wiesel

*'What I try is to speak to God.
Even when I speak against him, I speak to him'*³⁶⁰

Elie Wiesel was born in the Transylvanian Sighet and in 1944 (as 16 years old) he was deported with his family. He lost his mother, small sister and father in the concentration camps. After the liberation he studied in France, worked as a journalist and later moved to the US. In 1986 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for speaking out against repression, violence and racism. A lifelong theme of Elie Wiesel's work is the fight against the indifference towards injustices and he tries to keep alive the memory of the Holocaust as a warning for humanity. He is largely responsible for the creation of the term 'Holocaust' as a conceptual category, though later he preferred the term Churban, reminding the destruction of the Temple.³⁶¹ The tension between the incommunicability of the experience and the task of testimony characterizes Elie Wiesel's work.³⁶² The testimony prevents that the victims are killed again through forgetting.³⁶³ Auschwitz is a warning to humanity and its remembrance serves the aim of not letting it happen once again.³⁶⁴

Wehrlosigkeit. Diese ohnmächtige Kenose kostet den Menschen allzu viel.' E. LEVINAS, in: G. FUCHS, H.H. HENRIX: *Zeitgewinn*, p. 170, cited in H. H. HENRIX: *Machtenstagnung Gottes?*, in: *Prinzip Zukunft*, p. 108.

³⁵⁹ Cf. E. LEVINAS: *Gott und die Philosophie*. in: B. CASPER (Hg.): *Gott nennen. Phänomenologische Zugänge*, Freiburg/München 1981, p. 104ff; cited by H. H. HENRIX: *Machtentsagung Gottes?*, in *Prinzip Zukunft*, p.109.

³⁶⁰ *'Ich glaube nicht, daß wir über Gott reden können, wir können nur – wie es Kafka sagte – wir können nur zu Gott reden. Es hängt davon ab, wer redet. Selbst wenn ich gegen ihn spreche, ich spreche zu ihm. Und selbst wenn ich Zorn auf Gott habe, versuche ich, ihm meinen Zorn zu zeigen. Aber genau darin liegt ein Bekenntnis zu Gott.'* E. WIESEL, in: *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 93.

³⁶¹ Elie Wiesel refers to a Jewish view that every being is a living temple. The term Churban was used by many Jews after the war. Another term could be Shoah, though it means first of all natural catastrophe. Cf. *Bůh a zlo*, p. 74, 56; LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 185.

³⁶² Cf. *'Was ich zu tun versuche, ist, soviel Schweigen wie möglich in mein Werk hineinzubringen. Und ich wünsche mir, daß mein Werk eines Tages beurteilt würde nicht nach den Worten, die ich geschrieben habe, sondern nach ihrem Gewicht an Schweigen. Wenn ich das Schweigen übermitteln könnte, also die Nichtvermittelbarkeit (incommunicability), dann hätte ich zu einem kleinen Teil mein eigenes Werk gerechtfertigt.'* E. WIESEL: *Die politisch-moralische Aufgabe des Schriftstellers heute*, p. 112, cited by D. MENSINK: *Erinnerung ist das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 153.

³⁶³ Cf. *Zlo a exil*, p. 38.

³⁶⁴ Cf. E. WIESEL: *Jenseits des Schweigens*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 31.

Elie Wiesel regards himself as a child of Hasidism, since his childhood he was influenced by the Jewish Mysticism and he studied the Talmud. A constant question in his thought is the question on God: Where were You when your children needed You the most? What did God know, what did He do when His children were murdered by His other children?³⁶⁵ Where is God in all? How can one talk about God's mercy and salvation after Treblinka, or about anything else?³⁶⁶ Elie Wiesel sees the importance of the questions, without providing any ultimate answer to them.

After 10 years of silence Elie Wiesel put down his first testimony concerning his experience in the concentration camps. It was the meeting with the Catholic writer François Mauriac which gave a turning point: *'My lacking interest, his passion for Jesus. My childish and impolite remark that I knew Jewish children ten years ago who had to suffer more than Christ, and yet no one spoke about them. His human reaction, his silent tears. His answer: »But you should speak about them.« Without saying a word about my experience in the concentration camps, he was feeling it.'*³⁶⁷ In 1956 Elie Wiesel's first, autobiographical book was published in Yiddish with the title *Un die Welt hot geschwign* (And the world was silent). The revised and shortened French version appeared in 1958 with the title *La Nuit*, translated into other languages. The story tells the story of the child Eliezer, who gets forever separated from his mum and small sister in Auschwitz and survives the death of his father in Buchenwald. Night is a metaphor for the reign of evil.³⁶⁸ *'Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.'*³⁶⁹

The experience broke the image of God in the young Eliezer, who was brought up in the world of rabbinic and hasidic piety. *'Some talked of God, of his mysterious ways, of the sins of the Jewish people, and of their future deliverance. But I had ceased to pray. How I sympathized with Job! I did not deny God's existence, but I doubted His absolute justice.'*³⁷⁰ The God of love, gentleness and comfort has vanished. When the people in the camp are forced to watch the hanging of a child, who

³⁶⁵ Cf. E. WIESEL cited by D.B. JUNEKE: *Sending Forth the Dove*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 199.

³⁶⁶ Cf. E. WIESEL: *Gezeiten des Schweigens*, p. 8, quoted by B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 69; E. WIESEL: *Jenseits des Schweigens*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 12.

³⁶⁷ *'Ich habe an anderer Stelle jenes erste Treffen beschrieben. Mein mangelndes Interesse an, seine Leidenschaft für Jesus. Meine kindische und unhöfliche Bemerkung, daß ich zehn Jahre zuvor jüdische Kinder gekannt hätte, die mehr erleiden müßten als Christus, und daß niemand über sie sprach. Seine mitmenschliche Reaktion, seine stillen Tränen. Seine Antwort: »Aber Sie sollten darüber sprechen.« Ohne daß ich ein Wort über meine Erfahrungen in den Konzentrationslagern erwähnt hätte, spürte er es.'* E. WIESEL: *Jenseits des Schweigens*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 20.

³⁶⁸ The 'night' is a metaphor for the Holocaust by Elie Wiesel. Cf. B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 19.

³⁶⁹ E. WIESEL: *Night*, p. 45.

³⁷⁰ E. WIESEL: *Night*, p. 57.

has the face of a sad angel, Eliezer hears someone asking: 'Where is God now?' A voice within him answers: 'Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows.'³⁷¹

On the eve of Rosh Hashana, when the prisoners gather for a worship, the silent protest of Eliezer breaks out: '»What are You, my God!« I thought angrily, »compared to this afflicted crowd, proclaiming to You their faith, their anger, their revolt? What does Your greatness mean, Lord of the Universe, in the face of all this weakness, this decomposition, and this decay? Why do You still trouble their sick minds, their crippled bodies?«' The men in their suffering seem stronger and greater than God: 'But these men here, whom You have betrayed, whom You have allowed to be tortured, butchered, gassed, burned, what do they do? They pray before You! They praise Your name!'³⁷² 'This day I had ceased to plead. I was no longer capable of lamentation. On the contrary, I felt very strong. I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes were open and I was alone – terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy. I had ceased to be anything but ashes, yet I felt myself to be stronger than the Almighty, to whom my life had been tied for so long.'³⁷³ The experience of evil does not lead to the negation of God's existence, but to a radical confrontation with Him. Eliezer refuses the communication with God, he doubts about His justice and mercy and protests against the unmorality of God, who seems to be cruel and deceitful, letting innocents suffer and believers still hope in Him. This unmorality of God is contrasted by the moral greatness of the suffering man.³⁷⁴

Elie Wiesel's theatre play or 'tragic farce'³⁷⁵ *The Trial of God* (French original *Le procès de Shamgorod*) was published in 1979. It is an experience in the concentration camp which gave rise to this drama: 'Its genesis: inside the kingdom of night, I witnessed a strange trial. Three rabbis - all erudite and pious men – decided one winter evening to indict God for allowing his children to be massacred. I remember: I was there, and I felt like crying. But there nobody cried.'³⁷⁶ The three-act drama is set in Shamgorod in Ukraine on 25 February 1649 during the anti-Polish Cossack rebellion, not long after an anti-Jewish pogrom has taken place in the area.³⁷⁷ The date is the eve of Purim, the remembrance of the deliverance of Jews from Haman's intended slaughter. The scene is an inn where three hungry Jewish wandering minstrels have stopped and offer to act out a Purim drama. Berish, the proprietor finally agrees to a play, but a play of a *din torah* with God, a trial of God, without Him. 'I resigned from membership in God – I resigned from God. Let Him look for another innkeeper, let Him find another people, let Him push around another Jew – I'm through with Him!'³⁷⁸ Gradually, Berish's story is revealed: the price of his survival from the recent pogrom was seeing his wife killed and being forced to watch his now insane daughter raped by the invaders on her wedding day, after her fiancé was killed. 'To mention God's mercy in Shamgorod is an insult [...] I was an innkeeper; I still am. And

³⁷¹ E. WIESEL: *Night*, p. 77.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁷⁴ Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Verweigerung der Theodizee – Warten auf Theodizee*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 114.

³⁷⁵ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 1.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁷⁷ The Kabbalist Nathan Hanover - as an eyewitness of the pogrom in Venedig in 1653 - in his chronicle *Yeven metzulah* reports about the persecutions of Jews in the area of Ukraine and Poland in the 17th century, describing the cruel pogroms. The persecutions of Jews during the Cossack rebellion had an important role in the emergence of Hasidism. B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 7 - 11; Cf. E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 42.

³⁷⁸ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 15.

yet I have the impression that since that night I am no longer the same person. That night, life stopped flowing. Nothing matters any more. Nothing exists. Berish is alive, but I am not him. Life goes on, but outside me, away from me.³⁷⁹ Berish wants to say out the truth, calling God into account. It is for the sake of his daughter Hannah that he wants to pursue a lawsuit with God. The Purim players have also gone through other cruel pogroms. In the trial of God Berish becomes the prosecutor, the minstrels take roles as court officials and the Christian waitress Maria is the audience. However, no one wishes to play God's defence attorney. *'There is none – but who is to blame for that? His defenders? He killed them! He massacred His friends and allies! [...] Whose fault is it if the earth has become inhabited by assassins – by assassins alone?'* - cries out the innkeeper.³⁸⁰ Mendel, the leader of the Purim-players sighs: *'Poor King, poor mankind – one is as much to be pitied as the other...In the entire creation, from kingdom to kingdom and nation to nation, is there not one person to be found, one person to take the side of the Creator? Not one believer to explain his mysteries? Not one teacher to love Him in spite of everything, and love Him enough to defend Him against His accusers? Is there no one in the whole universe who would take the case of the Almighty God?'*³⁸¹ A mysterious stranger, Sam responds and is prepared to play the defendant of God. Berish charges God: *'I - Berish, Jewish innkeeper at Shamgorod – accuse Him of hostility, cruelty and indifference. Either He dislikes His chosen people or He doesn't care about them [...] Either He knows what's happening to us, or He doesn't wish to know! In both cases He is ...He is... guilty!'*³⁸² However, Sam has an answer for every charge and defends God brilliantly, awaking respect and wondering from the minstrels (even from the wise Mendel) despite the warnings of Maria who recognizes the evil in the stranger, being cruelly fooled by him in the past. Even if pushed to defence by Sam, Berish cannot accept his arguments. As the final scene unfolds, a mob approaches to pillage the inn at Shamgorod once more. Despite the recommendations of the Christian priest to accept the cross at least for a while, Berish and the Purim players hold on to their Jewish faith. They choose to die with their Purim masks in place. As Sam takes on his mask, all shout out in fear, and Sam - the Satan laughs: *'So – you took me for a saint, a Just? Me? How could you be that blind? How could you be that stupid? If you only knew, if you only knew...'*³⁸³ He gives a sign and the doors of the inn are broken through. The end of the theatre play is left open.

Sam's defence of God legitimates evil by being for God at the expense of humankind.³⁸⁴ The classical elements of theodicy arrive in Sam's arguments: evil and suffering are a reason for accusing humankind, but not God; God himself is a victim and sufferer; the sufferings of many are relativised by the happiness of others; it is not adequate to speak in the place of the victims, because no one of the survivors can take their perspective; the will of God cannot be judged according to human categories.³⁸⁵ According to Sam humans should submit to God's will and glorify Him in spite of everything. However, the innkeeper is not satisfied with Sam's arguments: *'I want no part of a justice that escapes me, diminishes me and makes a mockery out of mine! Justice is here for men and women – I therefore want it to be human, or let Him keep it!'*³⁸⁶ *'Whose truth? Mine! But if mine is*

³⁷⁹ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 44-45.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103-104.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 125.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁸⁴ J. K. ROTH: *Elie Wiesel's Challenge to Christianity*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 88.

³⁸⁵ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 125-135.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

not His as well, then He's worse than I thought. Then it would mean that He gave us the taste, the passion of truth without telling us that this truth is not true!' 'Would a father stand by quietly, silently, and watch his children being slaughtered?' 'He – a victim? A victim is powerless; is He powerless? [...] He could use His might to save the victims, but He doesn't!' ³⁸⁷ Elie Wiesel questions radically the classical theological arguments brought up by Sam: who tries to justify God with such arguments when facing the suffering of innocents, engages in the work of Satan, God's adversary. By the hint at God's guilt, theodicy is refused.³⁸⁸ The man is just deceived and fooled if he thinks he can create a theodicy for God instead of waiting for His answer.

Purim is a feast also of the mad, children and beggars, and during Purim the conditions can be playfully turned around.³⁸⁹ By Elie Wiesel, these are often the mad people who are most close to the real truth about the human situation and who are near to God.³⁹⁰ Purim is a feast when everything can be said out.³⁹¹ The *Trial of God* is a 'play in play': a Purim play inside Wiesel's theatre play, moving so on the border of seriousness and unsevereness, reality and illusion, which is expressed in Elie Wiesel's denotation of the work as a tragic farce. The end is open: what does Satan mean with his last words: 'If you only knew, if you only knew...'? From the context of Elie Wiesel's work we know that for him the belief in God is essential and the protest against Him is an expression of a final respect for Him. Theodicy is not silenced or made absurd, but it remains a question directed *on God*. The question of the sense of creation and suffering is kept open before God.³⁹²

There is a Jewish tradition of going to court with God. According to a hasidic story Rabbi Elimelech from Lisensk from neighbourly love to his fellowmen once condemned God.³⁹³ I'm citing Elie Wiesel's recount of his experience in Auschwitz, where he got befriended with a teacher of Talmud: 'One day he said, »Tonight don't go to your place. Stay with me.« So I stayed next to him. I did not know why, but I soon found out. He and two colleagues – also great masters in Talmud, in Halakhah, in Jewish jurisprudence – had convened a rabbinic court of law to indict the Almighty. He wanted me to witness it, to be there, to see it. And I remember every word, I remember every phase of that trial. It lasted for several nights. Witnesses were summoned. Arguments were heard, always in whisper, in order not to

³⁸⁷ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 127-129.

³⁸⁸ Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Verweigerung der Theodizee – Warten auf Theodizee*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 121f.

³⁸⁹ Cf. E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 91. Concerning Purim cf. B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 11-17. According to the Jewish tradition on Purim one should drink so much until he is unable to distinguish between good and evil, between Mordechai the Just and the wicked Haman.

³⁹⁰ R. McAFEE BROWN, cited by H. J. CARGAS: *Drama Reflecting Madness*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 158; Elsewhere Elie Wiesel talks about a holy madness: 'When I see the Word, the way it is; when I watch the events, the way they unfold; when I think of what is going to happen to our generation, then I have the feeling that I am haunted by that madness – that we all are. Then in order to save myself from that madness, I go back to another madness – a holy madness – the one that became a victim, the one that kept us alive for so many centuries, for thousands of year.' Cited by *Ibid.*, p. 161; Cf. R. McAFEE BROWN: *Twilight*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 177.

³⁹¹ Cf. E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 55-56. Berish saying to the others: 'So what! It's Purim – on Purim, everything goes! [...] You have the courage to do my kind of Purimspiel? Tell me! And go to the end of things – and utter words no one has ever uttered before? And ask question no one has ever dared ask before?' The words of Mendel (the leader of the Purim players): 'Tonight we will be free to say everything. To command, to imagine everything – even our impossible victory.'

³⁹² Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Verweigerung der Theodizee – Warten auf Theodizee*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 123f; cf. M. de SAINT CHERON: *ELIE WIESEL. Zlo a exil*; p. 34

³⁹³ B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 32.

arouse suspicion and punishment from the others. The arguments? You know the arguments: why and why and why and how long and how long will it last. At the end, after due deliberation, the tribunal issued its verdict, and my teacher, my friend, was the one to pronounce it: Guilty. There was a silence then that probably permeated the entire camp and the entire world, a silence that could be compared only to Mattan Torah at Sinai, which the Talmud describes as a special silence. Then after a minute or an infinity of silence he shook himself, smiled sadly, and said, »And now let us pray Maariv.«³⁹⁴

In Elie Wiesel's reaction to suffering, the questions and the practical actions are in the centre. Suffering itself is a mystery.³⁹⁵ He emphasises that the question of theodicy remains and has to remain open: 'At the end I will never cease to rise up against those who made or allowed Auschwitz to happen. Including God? Also against Him I will protest. The questions which I raised about God's silence remained open. If there is an answer, then I do not know it. And I do not want to know. For me it is a fact that the death of six million people raises a question which can never be answered.'³⁹⁶ At the same time he criticises the apathetic acceptance of evil and suffering. It is by helping others who are suffering and by avoiding being imprisoned in one's own suffering that one works towards the coming of Messiah. It is life and hope in spite of despair and hopelessness that Elie Wiesel calls for.³⁹⁷ He writes about his cantata *A Song for Hope* (performed in 1987): '[The cantata] represents for me the desperate effort of my own generation to invoke its right to hope. In the end, this right will become a duty. Instead of discouraging us, the spokesmen of the tragic past incite us to tenacity and faith. It is because Jeremiah has suffered that he can, in good faith, demand that we rise above our suffering. It is because our martyrs chose the supreme sacrifice, in order to remain true to themselves, that they have the right to urge on us another way than that of death.'³⁹⁸

Some critical remarks

Remembrance is a primary concern by Elie Wiesel. By remembrance he tries to counteract the indifference and the refusal of history. The aim of such remembrance is to serve humanity, not letting such disaster as the Holocaust happen again to any people. As the Christian theologian Miroslav Volf says in his book *The End of Memory*, remembrance is crucial also for the possibility of reconciliation. The happened reality cannot be washed simply away, but it has to be faced.³⁹⁹ It is important to emphasise that it is decisive how one remembers: remembrance can lead easily to revenge instead of reconciliation. However, this is not the case by Elie Wiesel or by Miroslav Volf: their remembrance is led by the belief in the God of salvation and mercy. A Jew or Christian cannot

³⁹⁴ Maariv is the prayer held in the evening or night. Quotation from *Against Silence. The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel. Band 3*, New York: Holocaust Library, p. 112, cited in B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 26.

³⁹⁵ M. de SAINT CHERON: *ELIE WIESEL. Zlo a exil*; p. 44.

³⁹⁶ 'Letzlich werde ich niemals aufhören, mich gegen diejenigen zu empören, die Auschwitz geschaffen oder zugelassen haben. Gott eingeschlossen? Auch gegen Ihn werde ich mich immer empören. Die Fragen, die ich mir zum Schweigen Gottes gestellt habe, sind offen geblieben. Wenn es eine Antwort gibt, so weiß ich sie nicht. Und ich will sie auch nicht wissen. Für mich steht fest, daß der Tod von sechs Millionen Menschen eine Frage aufwirft, die niemals eine Antwort finden kann.' E. WIESEL: *Alle Flüsse*, p. 118f; cited in B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 86.

³⁹⁷ Cf. M. de SAINT CHERON: *ELIE WIESEL. Zlo a exil*; p. 179.

³⁹⁸ Cited by D. K. HUNEKE: *Sending Forth the Dove*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 209.

³⁹⁹ If the guilt and wounds are left unsaid and untreated, they are just suppressed, but they still work underground or may burst out again.

remember history without remembering God's covenant and saving acts for the world. Such remembrance aims at justice, reconciliation and peace. Reconciliation points towards the new creation. Jürgen Moltmann writes: *„Reconciliation means deliverance from the burden of sin and rebirth to a different life, so that something new can come into existence. When according to biblical tradition God “forgives” guilt, he anticipates in the midst of history that new creation where one does not “have to remember or take to heart” this blood-soaked earth anymore (Jes 65,17; Offb 21,1). Only if forgiveness of guilt leads to remembrance, can it once also lead to “not having to remember.”*⁴⁰⁰

Jürgen Moltmann saw Christ in the child on the gallows from Elie Wiesel's *Night*: *‘A shattering expression of the theologia crucis which is suggested in the rabbinic theology of God's humiliation of himself is to be found in Night, a book written by E. Wiesel [...] Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference.*⁴⁰¹ Is God a victim? Is God the one who suffers with us? Moltmann refers to the rabbinic image of the *Shekhina*, who goes with His people into the exile and participates in their suffering. *‘Where that child hangs on the gallows, there hangs also God on the gallows. Where that child is tortured, there God Himself is tortured.’* Moltmann knows that in Elie Wiesel's story about the little child on the gallows there is no hint at Easter.⁴⁰² Elie Wiesel did not want this passage to be interpreted as Moltmann did it. There is no comfort or hope in the *Night*, but rather the feeling of forsakenness and the death of the trust in the merciful God.⁴⁰³ Though Elie Wiesel refers to the suffering *Shekhina* elsewhere,⁴⁰⁴ he does not speak about a suffering God here. In my opinion it is important to leave this passage to speak for itself. However, the glimpse of Jesus Christ in the tortured child should have been and should be a reaction of all Christians confronted with such happening (see Matthew 18:5-6; 25:31-46).

Elie Wiesel comments concerning a ‘death of God theology’: *‘It is strange that the philosophy which rejects God does not come from the survivors. No one of those who are known from a so-called death-of-God-theology was in Auschwitz.*⁴⁰⁵ Wiesel does not react on the reality of evil with an atheism or denial of God, but with an always new confrontation with Him. His protest against God is a protest

⁴⁰⁰ *„Versöhnung heißt Freisprechen von der Last der Schuld und Wiedergeburt zu einem anderen Leben, damit Neues werden kann. Wenn nach den biblischen Traditionen Gott Schuld »vergibt,« dann nimmt er mitten in der Geschichte jene neue Schöpfung vorweg, inder man dieser blutgetränkten Erde »nicht mehr gedenken noch sie zu Herzen nehmen muß« (Jes 65,17; Offb 21,1). Nur wenn das Vergeben von Schuld zum Gedenken führt, kann sie auch einmal zum »nicht mehr gedenken müssen« führen. Das hat mit Vergessen und Verdrängen nichts zu tun.’* MOLTSMANN, in: *Als Gott weinte*, p. 57-58

⁴⁰¹ J. MOLTSMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 274; J. MOLTSMANN: *„Die Grube“: - „Wo war Gott?“*, in: *Als Gott weinte*, p. 51.

⁴⁰² J. MOLTSMANN: *„Die Grube“: - „Wo war Gott?“*, in: *Als Gott weinte*, p. 51; Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Verweigerung der Theodizee – Warten auf Theodizee*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 115.

⁴⁰³ Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Verweigerung der Theodizee – Warten auf Theodizee*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 110f.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. M. de SAINT CHERON: *ELIE WIESEL. Zlo a exil*; p. 102.

⁴⁰⁵ *„Es ist seltsam, daß die Philosophie, die Gott verwirft, nicht von den Überlebenden stammt. Nicht einer von denen, die mit der sogenannten Gott-ist-tot-Theologie von sich reden machten, war selbst in Auschwitz“*, in: K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Verweigerung der Theodizee – Warten auf Theodizee*, in: *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 106.

before God, a protest to God.⁴⁰⁶ When he - like the biblical Job - accuses God of allowing the innocents to suffer, he refuses to deny his existence.⁴⁰⁷ Wiesel sees the relationship between God and His people as an endless engagement with each other: in it *'there are quarrels and reconciliations, more quarrels and more reconciliations...yet neither God nor the Jews ever gave up on the other. [...] For this is the essence of being Jewish: never to give up – never to yield to despair.'*⁴⁰⁸

Elie Wiesel's fighting with God follows a Jewish tradition which appears by Moses, Abraham, Job or by the Hasidic Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev: one may question God and *'say no to God on behalf of His Creation, on behalf of one's people, one's community.'*⁴⁰⁹ In Wiesel's *Trial of God* it is the argument of the Satan to accept everything and just to praise God: *'He created the world and me without asking for my opinion; He may do with both whatever He wishes. Our task is to glorify Him, to praise Him, to love Him – in spite of ourselves.'*⁴¹⁰ On the question: *'What is there left for us to do?'* Satan answers: *'Endure. Accept. And say Amen.'*⁴¹¹ However, Elie Wiesel, in agreement with the earlier Jewish tradition emphasises that one cannot serve God and be indifferent to one's neighbour. There is no way to love God without loving His creation.⁴¹²

It is a legitimate question whether man's responsibility should not be emphasised more. Yet, Berish's question and accusation in *The Trial of God* address both God and men: the two are inseparably joined. *'I want to know why human beings turn into beasts. [...] I want to know how good family men can slaughter children and crush old people.'*⁴¹³ *'I want to understand why He is giving strength to the killers and nothing but tears and the shame of helplessness to the victims.'*⁴¹⁴ Elie Wiesel writes later: *'But with the passing of the years, I have come to understand the twofold questioning that modern man has to undergo: just as I have the right to ask the Judge of all men and women, »Why did you allow Auschwitz to happen?« He also has the right to ask us, »Why did you spoil my creation? What right had you to cut the trees of life to make of them an altar to the glory of death?«'*⁴¹⁵ God is not only fought with, but according to Hasidic and mystical masters He is even often to be pitied. Wiesel writes: *'Yes, God inspires not only love and piety, justice and respect, but also compassion and*

⁴⁰⁶ *'Was ich versuche, ist, zu Gott zu sprechen. Selbst wenn ich gegen ihn spreche, spreche ich zu ihm. Und selbst wenn ich Zorn auf Gott habe, versuche ich, ihm meinen Zorn zu zeigen. Aber genau darin liegt ein Bekenntnis zu Gott, nicht eine Negation Gottes. [...] Es war nicht einfach, im Glauben zu bleiben. Dennoch kann ich sagen, daß ich trotz der Schwierigkeiten und Hindernisse Gott nie verlassen habe. Ich hatte große Probleme mit ihm und habe es immer noch. Deshalb protestiere ich gegen ihn. Manchmal strengte ich gegen ihn einen Prozeß an. Dennoch: Alles, was ich tue, geschieht vom Innern des Glaubens, nicht von außen.'* E. WIESEL, cited in: *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 93.

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. O. LEAMAN: *Evil and suffering in Jewish philosophy*, p. 213.

⁴⁰⁸ E. WIESEL: *A Jew Today*, cited by O. LEAMAN: *Evil and suffering in Jewish philosophy*, p. 210.

⁴⁰⁹ E. WIESEL, cited by I. ABRAHAMSON: *And God was silent*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 170.

⁴¹⁰ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 157.

⁴¹¹ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 132.

⁴¹² Cf. M. de SAINT CHERON: *ELIE WIESEL. Zlo a exil*; p. 40; 62. *'Jestliže miluješ cizince, budeš milovat i přitele, a jestliže miluješ přitele, budeš milovat Boha.'* ('If you love the foreigner, you will also love your friend, and if you love your friend, you will also love God.'). Cf. *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 101: *'Und hier bin ich zusammen mit der chassidischen Tradition der Überzeugung, daß der einfachste Weg zu Gott über andere Menschen führt. Ein Mensch allein ist Gott nicht nahe. Um nahe bei Gott zu sein, muß er einem anderen Menschen nahe sein.[...] Wenn zwei Menschen einander lieben, ist Gott dabei. Gott ist anwesend, wenn Menschen zueinander menschlich und füreinander da sind. Gott sagt zum Menschen nicht: »Dein Leben gehört mir.« Gott spricht: »Dein Leben gehört deinem Nächsten«'*

⁴¹³ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 90.

⁴¹⁴ E. WIESEL: *The Trial of God*, p. 43.

⁴¹⁵ E. WIESEL: *The Solitude of God*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 7.

*pity [...] pity for the Father who suffers with His suffering children and sometimes makes them suffer; pity for the weary Judge, transcended by His own severity: pity for the King whose crown is so often dragged through the dust, whose word is ill heard, misunderstood, misinterpreted.*⁴¹⁶

The way how one copes with evil and suffering depends on his way of seeing reality and belief. Hans Jonas' protection of God's goodness is important and it is crucial for the ethics. Elie Wiesel's refusal of an answer to the question of theodicy is an expression of a respect for God: He Himself should prove and show His justice. I think this can be translated into interpersonal relations: the man should prove and show that he believes in the God who stands against injustice. The Satan's arguments in *The Trial of God* present an image of God to whom people should submit themselves patiently and accept the cruel reality as God's will. On the contrary, the protest against injustice and calling God to account is a cry for justice and a cry for God who is just and does not let innocents suffer. The refusal of theodicy is a waiting for theodicy, a waiting for God. Concerning ethics, both Hans Jonas and Elie Wiesel give a strong motivation. However, calling God to responsibility and the belief in His power to fight evil gives a strength and hope which does not break down when confronting the cruelty of men. It should be emphasised that the God fought with by Elie Wiesel is the God of the Bible, the mighty Creator, who revealed Himself as the God of Exodus and salvation. This God is called to responsibility when facing the evil reality: His salvation is demanded. And the man should show with his life whether he believes in the God of salvation, justice, mercy and peace or not. Wiesel writes: *„But you will ask me: what about the Messiah in all this? Well, I still believe in him. I believe in the Messiah with all my heart, even more than before. But his coming depends on us.*'⁴¹⁷ The waiting for the Messiah is a hope in spite of all. Even though we cannot find belief when confronted with the evil of the world and people, we should raise our belief in God and humans in spite of all, and hope in spite of hopelessness.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ E. WIESEL: *The Solitude of God*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 1.

⁴¹⁷ E. WIESEL: *The Solitude of God*, in: *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 6; Cf. *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 94.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 97; p. 61; *„Wenn ich mich in der Welt umsehe, sehe ich nichts als Hoffnungslosigkeit. Und trotzdem: Ich muß, wir alle müssen versuchen, eine Quelle für die Hoffnung zu finden. Wir müssen dem Menschen zum Trotz an den Menschen glauben.*' p. 63.

The Question of Evil and Suffering in Christianity

In the following I would like to sketch some important answers to the problem of suffering and evil in the Christian tradition, in order to see the similarities or distinctive characteristics when compared with the Jewish or Islamic views and to understand the context of the position of two recent Christian theologians: Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz.

The reason for suffering and evil is nowhere systematically discussed in the Christian **Bible**, neither in the Old nor in the New Testament. The Gospels represent Jesus as the one who met the facts of suffering in an active and practical way. Various views and attitudes belonging to the Jewish tradition emerge in the gospel narratives, but they emerge by implication rather than by way of specific discussion.⁴¹⁹ In the New Testament we can also find the connection between sin and suffering (appearing e.g. in the healing narratives⁴²⁰), though a simple cause-and-effect understanding is repudiated.⁴²¹ On the question about the sin of a blind man Jesus answers: *'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him'*, and he heals the man (John 9:3f). Paul in the letter to the Romans writes about the universal sinfulness of humans (Romans 5) and about the bondage of corruption to which the creation is subjected, longing for delivery (Romans 8:19f). The view that suffering is a consequence of the activity of Satan and the demons is also found in the New Testament and in Judaism at that time. Jesus' ministry includes the fight against evil and the alleviation of suffering by healing and saving from the bondage of sin.⁴²² Confronted with the untruth and sinfulness of the world, Jesus' mission led to his own passion and death. In the garden of Gethsemane he faced suffering with the wish it might be otherwise, but with an unbroken confidence in God.⁴²³ Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection reveal both the seriousness of sin and the mercy and power of God which overcomes it. The good news of the gospels is that the kingdom of God has appeared in Jesus Christ, bringing salvation and victory over evil. Belonging to Jesus includes active engagement against evil and suffering in love to our fellow human beings.⁴²⁴ It is clear that this discipleship involves suffering which should be endured in faith, hope and in the power of God.⁴²⁵ In the first letter of Peter and in the letter of James we find the view of suffering as a trial and also as a temptation which has to be faced in faith.⁴²⁶ When confronted with persecutions and afflictions, Paul writes about the Christian faith as follows: *'But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.'* (2 Corinthians 4:7-10) The Christian suffering is understood as participation in Christ's suffering: as *'filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions'*, *'on behalf of his body (which is the church)'* (Colossians 1: 24). The belief

⁴¹⁹ J. BOWKER, p. 51.

⁴²⁰ *'And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5)*

⁴²¹ Cf. Luke 13:1-5.

⁴²² Cf. R. DILLMANN: *Durch Leiden Gehorsam lernen?*, in: *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben?*, p. 120f.

⁴²³ Cf. Hebrews 5:7-10 *'In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation'*

⁴²⁴ Cf. e. g. Matthew 25: 34f, Ephesians 4:32-35, 6: 10-17.

⁴²⁵ Cf. e.g. 1 Peter 5: 8-11.

⁴²⁶ James 1:2f; 1 Peter 1:7, 4: 12f, 5: 7-9.

that nothing can separate the Christians from the love of God and the hope in the final salvation are based on the experience of the resurrection of the crucified Lord. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a sign of the new creation.⁴²⁷ As the Revelations express it, sufferings are met realistically in the power of Christ and in the confidence of his victory.⁴²⁸ In the kingdom of God and new creation - which has broken into the world in Jesus Christ and which is to come fully at the end of times - there will be no more pain, tears and death. *'And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."* (Revelations 21:3-4, cf. Isaiah 25:8, 35:10)

The Scriptures hold out the ambivalence of human existence in trusting confidence. The question of theodicy stays ultimately unanswered in the Bible. How can the goodness of the Creator, whose love, saving will and might over all evil powers have been revealed in Jesus Christ, be reconcilable with the history and presence of human sin and evil which is still ruling the world? Christians have been fighting with this question, too. My aim is not to summarize the theological thinking concerning the question of theodicy, but I would like to mention some important views which have played a great role especially in western Christian tradition:

With the appearance of strong dualistic world views (gnosis, Manicheism) it became important in the early church to emphasize the creation of all things by one almighty and good God (cf. the Nicene Creed from 325). From the early **church fathers**, Irenaeus emphasizes the oneness of the Creator God and the Redeemer God. He suggests that man was created as an imperfect creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally brought to perfection intended for him by the Creator. Jesus Christ leads creation to its aim: to the communion with God.⁴²⁹ On the other side, Tertullian sees salvation as the restitution of the order which was corrupted by sin.⁴³⁰ Tertullian emphasizes the free will of humans and speaks about the bias towards sin in which Adam's transgression has involved mankind. *'Every soul is counted as being in Adam until it is re-counted as being in Christ.'*⁴³¹

The theology of **Augustine** gave a decisive direction for the next centuries in western theological thinking. According to Augustine all things are originally good. Evil has no substance in itself, but it is the absence of good (*privatio boni*). According to Augustine even evil has its place in the order of the universe, causing the good to be more pleasing and laudable. Evil itself is a result of the misuse of free will, which appears in the rebellion of the angels and in the original sin of Adam. Adam's sin is transmitted to all people. God has permitted evil, because He was still in control and could bring good out of it. God's work in Christ redeems and reconciles the sinners to God.⁴³² **Thomas Aquinas** follows Augustine in his view of seeing evil as an absence of good and speaking about its right place

⁴²⁷ Cf. Romans 8; Acts 2; Romans 5: 1-5; Joel 3:28; Ezechiel 36:27, 37:1-14.

⁴²⁸ Cf. J. BOWKER, p. 80.

⁴²⁹ *Handbuch der Dogmatik I*, p. 329. 331; J. BOWKER, p. 85; Cf. IRENAEUS: *Adversus Haereses IV; Gegen die Häresien, Buch IV, 4, 38.*

⁴³⁰ *Handbuch der Dogmatik I*, p. 331.

⁴³¹ TERTULLIAN: *De anima*, quoted by J. BOWKER, p. 83.

⁴³² A. AUGUSTINUS: *Der Gottesstaat. De civitate Dei, XIV 11*, p. 949; AUGUSTINE: *Enchiridion*, quoted by J. BOWKER, p. 86f; Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 52-58.

in the natural order. Differently from Augustine, he emphasizes the accidentality of evil. He makes a difference between direct and indirect willing. God wills to permit evil, but he wills directly only the good.⁴³³

The **church doctrines** differentiate earlier between God's foreknowledge and predestination: the foreknowledge of evil is not the predestination to evil. Man is judged because of his own unrighteousness (cf. the Synod of Valence, 855).⁴³⁴ God wants the salvation of all humans, even if not all will be saved (Synod of Quiercy, 853).⁴³⁵ The Fourth Council of the Lateran (1215) emphasizes again that everything exists due to God's creation and all evil derives from the fall failure of creation.⁴³⁶ The Council of Florence (1442) adds that there is no such thing as an evil nature. God created all things in His goodness and freedom. The creatureliness and limitation of the creatures is the ground for their possible failure, but their nature remains good.⁴³⁷

In the time of reformation **Calvin** argues against the thomistic differentiation between God's willing and permitting. Calvin emphasizes the limitations of human understanding, but also God's justice and His grace.⁴³⁸ The confrontation with the reformation leads in Roman Catholicism to the rejection of strict predestinarianism and to the emphasis of the difference between predestination and God's permission of evil (Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, 1547).⁴³⁹

In the age of Enlightenment **Leibniz** tries to answer the question of theodicy philosophically, using the argument about the order of cosmos, where evil (as the lack of good) has its meaning too. Since God is omnipotent, benevolent and free creator of the world, the world is the best of all possible worlds.⁴⁴⁰ However, the great earthquake in Lisbon in 1755 with thousands of people killed becomes an example against such optimism: Voltaire's *Candide* makes a mock of the metaphysical optimism of Leibniz. **Kant** claims and proves the impossibility to answer the question of theodicy theoretically due to the limitations of the human reason. Arthur Schopenhauer argues that this world is in fact the worst of all possible worlds and optimism is a '*bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of mankind.*'⁴⁴¹ The theism of the enlightened theodicy turns even into atheism and the suffering becomes 'a rock' of the protest atheism.⁴⁴²

⁴³³ K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 60.

⁴³⁴ K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Ist Gott verantwortlich für das Übel?*, in: *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben?*, p. 235.

⁴³⁵ K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 49-51.

⁴³⁶ K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 47.

⁴³⁷ K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 48.

⁴³⁸ Cf. W. GROSS, K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Bůh a zlo*, p. 79.

⁴³⁹ W. GROSS, K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Bůh a zlo*, p. 64.

⁴⁴⁰ W. GROSS, K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Bůh a zlo*, p. 84-87; Cf. *Handbuch der Dogmatik I*, p. 197.

⁴⁴¹ '*Not this world is arranged as it had to be if it were to be capable of continuing with great difficulty to exist; if it were a little worse, it would no longer be capable of continuing to exist. Consequently, since a worse world could not continue to exist, it is absolutely impossible; and this world itself is the worst of all possible worlds.*' SCHOPENHAUER: *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Zürcher Ausgabe), vol. II/2, p. 683; vol. I/2, p. 408; quoted in ORMSBY, p. 9.

⁴⁴² Cf. Quotation from Georg Büchner, p. 7 ('*One may deny evil, but not pain; only reason can prove the existence of God, our feelings rebel against it. Mark this, Anaxagoras: why do I suffer? That is the rock of atheism. The*

Classical theology managed to avoid dualism and emphasized the free will of humans and so the human co-responsibility for evil. However, the question of unjust and innocent suffering remains unresolved in all arguments. The **recent theology and philosophy** poses again the question of evil. The recent theologian John Hick differentiates between two possible types of theodicy found in the Christian tradition: the major Augustinian type emphasizing the human free will, and the minor Irenaean type concentrating on the process of perfection. Hick's person (or soul)-making theodicy belongs to the 'Irenaean type' of this classification. According to Hick God created humans as morally and spiritually imperfect creatures who need to become more mature. The challenges and dangers of the world are necessary aspects in the process of moral and spiritual growth. The process aims at the eschatological final perfection and the full personal communion in the kingdom God.⁴⁴³ Richard Swinburne's philosophical free-will-defense emphasizes the value of human freedom. According to Swinburne the worth of freedom (as an ability of free and responsible choices) legitimates the permission of the possibility of evil.⁴⁴⁴ However, both Hick's and Swinburne's theodicy carries the danger of the instrumentalisation and justification of evil: evil seems to serve the achievement or realization of certain values or purposes.^{445 446}

In recent philosophy and theology there are some other rather untraditional attempts to deal with the question of theodicy. I would like to mention the **process theodicy** (of A. N. Whitehead, D. R. Griffin), which refuses the traditional concept of God's omnipotence and the creation from 'nothing'. The world material has its own dynamics. God cannot guarantee the outcome of the evolutionary process, but He influences the world process by His persuasive activity: He guides it through His infinite love, patience and care in the right direction towards the realization of the valuable and the best possible.⁴⁴⁷ From the side of Christian theology there are fundamental reservations about process theology. Using the formulation of John Polkinghorne: is the God of such theology still the God of Jesus Christ who raised him from the dead?⁴⁴⁸

The Shoah challenged Christian theology too, leading to a conscious confrontation with it (a **theology after 'Auschwitz'**). From the German theologians Dorothe Sölle, Jürgen Moltmann and Johann

smallest twing of pain – and it may stir up only a single atom – makes a rent in Creation from top to bottom.'
Danton's Tod)

⁴⁴³ JOHN HICK: *Eine irenäische Theodizee*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 87-103; Cf. A. KREINER: *Gott und das Leid*, p. 161-173.

⁴⁴⁴ R. SWINBURNE: *Das Problem des Übels*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 70-81.

⁴⁴⁵ A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 84.

⁴⁴⁶ Another theodicy which emphasizes the importance of freedom could be that of the Roman Catholic dogmatist Gisbert Greshake. According to him suffering is the price of freedom and of love (love is possible only in freedom). He emphasizes that God in Jesus Christ took the suffering on Himself and overcame it. God's suffering with us and the experience of Easter gives strength and hope in the sufferings. (G. GRESHAKE: *Der Preis der Liebe*) The problem in Greshake's conception is the question: How could God allow Auschwitz or the other genocides to happen just because He respects human freedom? Is that not too high a price? (Cf. the critical remarks to Hans Jonas); Cf. W. GROSS, K-J. KUSCHEL: *Bûh a zlo*, 169f.

⁴⁴⁷ Catharine Keller emphasizes that God's power is the power of His love. C. KELLER: *Über das Geheimnis*, p. 138. Cf. D. R. GRIFFIN: *Schöpfung aus dem Chaos und das Problem des Übels*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 48-65; A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 46-48; Cf. A. KREINER: *Gott und das Leid*, p. 104f.

⁴⁴⁸ 'Um es auf den Punkt zu bringen: Der Gott der Prozesstheologie scheint nicht der Gott zu sein, der Jesus von den Toten auferweckte.' J. POLKINGHORNE: *Science and Christian Belief*, London 1994, 68; cited in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 47.

Baptist Metz are of exemplary significance. For Metz the irritation of the Shoah is caused by the possibility of such a catastrophe in 'Christianized' Europe and by the long lasting unaffectedness of theology by this suffering.⁴⁴⁹ Auschwitz was an attack on everything which should have been holy for us Christians.⁴⁵⁰ Metz criticizes the speech about God which neglects or ignores the terrors of history, and he calls for a theodicy-sensitive theology. Moltmann speaks about God's suffering and about a theodicy-process on Golgotha which will be accomplished eschatologically (see later).⁴⁵¹ Karl Rahner criticizes the notion of the suffering God and understands the incomprehensibility of suffering as a part of God's incomprehensibility.⁴⁵²

The British theologian Kenneth Surin speaks also about the suffering God. The problem of theodicy has to be approached in the sense of the *theologia crucis*. Surin suggests that the suffering God is the Christian answer to the problem of evil, even if it is not a theodicy. He emphasizes that the cross is inseparable from the message of resurrection. Theodicy should not be separated from the perspective of soteriology.⁴⁵³

According to Karl Barth the justification of sinners in Jesus Christ is at the same time God's self-justification. As Karl-Josef Kuschel notes, the self-justification of God in Jesus Christ is the ground of our hope for God's definitive and final self-justification.⁴⁵⁴

In conclusion, I would like to summarize some interrelated understandings of suffering in Christian belief:

1. Suffering as the consequence of sin. The sin appearing with the misuse of creaturely freedom has far reaching consequences and leads to evil in the world. Sin distorts the relationship with God and the relationships and good order of creation.⁴⁵⁵ Suffering is the result and sign of evil.
2. Suffering as a part of the yet imperfect world. God leads his creation to its aim: to the final Sabbath rest, to the communion in and with God.⁴⁵⁶
3. Suffering as participation in the suffering of Jesus Christ. Jesus' mission led to his suffering and death when confronted with the sinfulness of the world. Christ's passion and death is understood as atonement for sins, as suffering for the salvation of the world. Christ had to go through suffering and death in order to overcome it and to bring salvation. In his love he took on himself the sin of the

⁴⁴⁹ ,Warum sieht man der Theologie diese Katastrophe – wie überhaupt die Leidensgeschichte der Menschen – so wenig oder überhaupt nicht an? [...] Ich war beunruhigt von dem augenfälligen Apathiegehalt der Theologie, von ihrer erstaunlichen Verblüffungsfestigkeit, ich könnte auch – im Fachjargon – sagen: von ihrer mangelnden Theodizee-Empfindlichkeit.' J. B. METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 38.

⁴⁵⁰ Auschwitz wurde ,zu einem Attentat auf alles, was uns – den Christen – hätte heilig sein müssen' J. B. METZ, in: *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann*, p. 159.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 70.

⁴⁵² ,Die Unbegreiflichkeit des Leides ist ein Stück der Unbegreiflichkeit Gottes.' K. RAHNER: *Warum lässt uns Gott leiden?*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 154.

⁴⁵³ Cf. KENNETH SURIN: *Die Leidensunfähigkeit Gottes und das Problem des Übels*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 138.

⁴⁵⁴ K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 94; Cf. K. BARTH: *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Bd. IV/1, Zürich 1975, p. 633.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. *Handbuch der Dogmatik I*, p. 166.

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. J. T. DUTARI: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen. Der Sündenfall und das Leiden Gottes im Christentum*, in: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 93.

world and the suffering imposed on him, without passing it further on, and so breaking the chain of violence and sin.⁴⁵⁷ Christians accept the gift of salvation in continuous repentance and through their life give witness to the Lord.⁴⁵⁸ The Christian life includes suffering resulting from this witness and from the fallenness of the world. I'm citing Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *'Man is summoned to share in God's sufferings at the hands of a godless world.'*⁴⁵⁹

A special Christian response to suffering is the passion mysticism. The identification with Christ includes also the identification with the suffering Jesus. The participation in Jesus' suffering is a offensiveproactive acceptance of suffering, which emerges from a resistance against evil and violence.⁴⁶⁰ The integration of the sufferings into the relationship with God enables their transformation.⁴⁶¹

4. Suffering as testing and trial. Suffering is a challenge in which one should stand fast holding on to the belief and hope which is grounded in Jesus Christ. The experience of salvation in Jesus Christ encourages the believers to live as new creations in Him and to endure the present sufferings in the confident hope for the future consummation.⁴⁶²

5. Suffering has only limited duration: evil (which is the cause of suffering) is already defeated by Jesus Christ and will be ultimately destroyed when the Kingdom of God comes in its fullness. In Suffering can be endured in the power of the Holy Spirit and its negative power broken.

6. Suffering as a mystery, as an unanswered question. Nothing can explain away the reality of evil and suffering. The openness of this question holds on in hope on God's final answer. Karl Rahner writes: *'There is no blessed light that could illuminate the dark abyssality of suffering, but only God himself.'*⁴⁶³ Karl-Josef Kuschel emphasizes the importance of the tradition of the biblical laments and the possibility of questioning and fighting with God as an expression of faith (a protest against God - before God).⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. the mimetic theory of RENE GIRARD, Cf. RAYMUND SCHWAGER: *Brauchen wir einen Sündenbock? Gewalt und Erlösung in den biblischen Schriften*

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. J. T. DUTARI: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen. Der Sündenfall und das Leiden Gottes im Christentum*, in: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 71.

⁴⁵⁹ *'Der Mensch ist aufgerufen, das Leiden Gottes an der gottlosen Welt mit zu leiden'* D. BONHOEFFER, Brief aus der Haft, 18. 7. 1944, *Widerstand und Ergebung; Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 361. He writes in the same letter: *'That is metanoia: not in the first place thinking about one's own needs, problems, sins, and fears, but allowing oneself to be caught up into the way of Jesus Christ, into the messianic event, thus fulfilling Isa. 53.'*

⁴⁶⁰ It should not be misunderstood and lead to a cheap acceptance of suffering (it would be a false passion mysticism.) Cf. G. FUCHS: *'Wir sind sein Kreuz'. Mystik und Theodizee*. In: *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben?*, p. 151; J. B. BRANTSHCEN: *Proč nás dobrý Bůh nechává trpět?*, p. 55f.

⁴⁶¹ G. FUCHS: *'Wir sind sein Kreuz'. Mystik und Theodizee*. In: *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben?*, p. 163.

⁴⁶² Cf. *Handbuch der Dogmatik I*, p. 150.

⁴⁶³ *'Es gibt kein seliges Licht, das die finstere Abgründigkeit des Leidens erhellt, als Gott selbst.'* K. RAHNER: *Warum lässt uns Gott leiden?*, in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 157.

⁴⁶⁴ *'Es ist eine theologiegeschichtliche Tragik, daß diese Tradition des Protestes gegen Gott atheistisch zugespitzt werden mußten, bevor sie innerkirchlich Gehör fanden. Ein Traditionsstrang kam für glaubende Menschen auf diese Weise gar nicht mehr in den Blick: Der Protest gegen Gott – vor Gott.'* K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Ist Gott verantwortlich für das Übel?*, in: *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben?*, p. 251.

In Jesus Christ God turns with his ultimate saving care towards the world⁴⁶⁵, and this becomes the ground of the Christian hope and joy. The cross is the sign of God's solidarity even in the deepest abyss of human desolation, as well as the sign of judgment and victory over sin. For the Christian praxis it means solidarity with the suffering creation as well as fight against the evil causes of suffering. Communion with Christ means participation in his loving and saving care for creation. The Christian hope provides also resistance against the dark abysmality of suffering.

The question of theodicy remains open. It emerges anew when one knows about God's love and about the cross of Jesus Christ. Why such evil in the world that even God's Son had to suffer and die? How long will the history of suffering still last? Or the questions of Romano Guardini at the end of his life: *'Why, God, these fearful detours on the way to salvation, why the suffering of the innocents, why sin?'*⁴⁶⁶ Without knowing the answer to these questions, the Christian hope and praxis are looking to the crucified and resurrected Lord who has come and is coming to heal and save. The New Testament ends with the call for his final advent: *'Come, Lord Jesus.'*⁴⁶⁷

The Cross in God and God in the Cross - Jürgen Moltmann's Trinitarian Theology of the Cross

'The cross reveals the heart of the triune God, which beats for his whole creation.' (J. Moltmann)⁴⁶⁸
'Only the suffering God can help' (D. Bonhoeffer)⁴⁶⁹

'Jesus' death belongs to God's self-utterance' - writes Karl Rahner.⁴⁷⁰ What does the cross of Jesus Christ mean for God? Reflecting on this question Jürgen Moltmann unfolds his theology of the Cross.

According to Moltmann the Cross is the inner criterion of all Christian theology. *'Christian faith stands and falls with the knowledge of the crucified Christ, that is, with the knowledge of God in the crucified Christ, or, to use Luther's even bolder phrase, with the knowledge of the »crucified God.«'*⁴⁷¹ *'I saw the God-forsaken cry with which Christ dies on the cross as as the criterion for all theology which claims to be Christian. For me the theology of the cross came to be seen in the context of the*

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. *Handbuch der Dogmatik I*, p. 426; Jesus *,die endgültige, unüberholbare und siegreiche, also die eschatologische Zuwendung Gottes zum Menschen ist'* K. RAHNER, quoted by J. T. DUTARI: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen. Der Sündenfall und das Leiden Gottes im Christentum*, in: *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 87;

⁴⁶⁶ R. GUARDINI, cited in: J. B. METZ: *A Passion for God*, p. 117

(https://books.google.cz/books/about/A_Passion_for_God.html?id=C7lqBAqnQHcC&redir_esc=y)

⁴⁶⁷ *Revelation 22:20*

⁴⁶⁸ J. MOLTMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 173.

⁴⁶⁹ *'God lets himself be pushed out of the world on the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. [...] Only the suffering God can help'* (Tegel, 16 July 1944), D. BONHOEFFER: *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 360, quoted in: MOLTMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 47.

⁴⁷⁰ K. RAHNER: *Sacramentum Mundi II*, 1968, 951f; cited in MOLTMANN: *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 186; *The Crucified God*, p. 278.

⁴⁷¹ MOLTMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 65. (*'Christian faith stands and falls with the knowledge of the crucified Christ, that is, with the knowledge of God in the crucified Christ, or, to use Luther's even bolder phrase, with the knowledge of the »crucified God.«'* MOLTMANN: *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, S. 66)

*theodicy question, confuting not merely abstract theism but abstract atheism too.*⁴⁷² Abstract theism and atheism are using logical inference by drawing conclusions from the existence of the world as it is, and they are not able to think God and the cross together. A theistic answer would 'evacuate the cross.' An atheistic answer 'would no longer be taking Jesus' dying cry to God seriously.'⁴⁷³ According to Moltmann a theistic image of God which emphasizes God's impassibility and immutability would separate the Cross from God, so the Cross would lose its universal redemptive significance.

Christ's cross is in the centre of Moltmann's Trinitarian theology. He tries to think the Cross and Trinity together and to show the relation of this Trinitarian theology of the Cross to the concrete history of suffering. Moltmann understands the Trinity as a dialectical and eschatologically open happening. The abysmal God-forsakenness of Jesus on the cross is an event in God himself. Jesus' death is not the death of God, but the death on the cross is *in* God and God is in Jesus' death.⁴⁷⁴ The Son suffers dying in forsakenness, the Father suffers the death of the Son in infinite pain⁴⁷⁵, and from the event between Jesus and his Father the life-giving Spirit of love emerges.⁴⁷⁶ The resurrection of the Son opens up the eschatological hope for the new creation in Christ. The Cross is an event in the heart of the Trinity: it reveals the heart of the triune God.⁴⁷⁷ On the Cross the Father and the Son experience the deepest separation and at same time they are so much at one that they present a single surrendering movement, which happens 'through the Spirit.'⁴⁷⁸ 'God is love: that means God is self-giving. It means God exists for us: on the cross.'⁴⁷⁹ 'God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love.'⁴⁸⁰ This suffering of God is a suffering in solidarity, a vicarious saving suffering. God is saving us at the point where we are unable to stand but are forced to sink into nothingness.⁴⁸¹ The believer is taken up into the inner life of God, when in the cross of Christ he experiences the love of God for the godless.⁴⁸²

Moltmann speaks about a history in God himself, which will be completed in the eschaton. Because Christ identified himself in his suffering and death with all people, the sufferers are integrated into the Trinitarian history of God, which leads to the final consummation of the Kingdom of God, to healing and to the overcoming of death. 'All human history, however much it may be determined by

⁴⁷² MOLTSMANN: *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 152. (Ich sah in dem gottverlassenen Schrei, mit dem Christus am Kreuz stirbt, das Kriterium für alle Theologie, die christlich zu sein beansprucht. Kreuzestheologie trat für mich in den Horizont der Theodizeefrage und widerlegte den abstrakten Theismus wie den abstrakten Atheismus. 'Der Weg Jesu Christi, S. 173)

⁴⁷³ MOLTSMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 225; KORTHAUS: *Kreuzestheologie*, S. 241. God reveals himself in the godforsakenness. (Gott wird in der Gottlosigkeit offenbar.) Cf. Moltmann's reflections on the dialectical and analogical knowledge of God (dialektische und analogische Gotteserkenntnis: das dialektische Prinzip der Gotteserkenntnis ist überhaupt die Ermöglichung einer analogischen Erkenntnis)

⁴⁷⁴ *The Crucified God*, p. 207.

⁴⁷⁵ *Patricompassionismus*. Cf. TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 190.

⁴⁷⁶ *The Crucified God*, p. 243, 246, 252; *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 230, 232, 239; Moltmann speaks only fragmentarily about the Holy Spirit in this book (*The Crucified God*); he himself acknowledges it as a deficiency (*Diskussion über Jürgen Moltmanns Buch 'Der gekreuzigte Gott'*, Chr. Kaiser, 1979, p.184)

⁴⁷⁷ MOLTSMANN: *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 173.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 173, 174.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175; 'Gott ist Liebe, d.h. Gott ist Hingabe, d. h. Gott existiert für uns: am Kreuz.' *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, S. 196-197

⁴⁸⁰ *The Crucified God*, p. 227.

⁴⁸¹ *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 179, 181.

⁴⁸² *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 235; *The Crucified God*, p. 249.

guilt and death, is taken up into this »history of God«, i. e. into the Trinity, and integrated into the future of the »history of God«.⁴⁸³

God promises the eschatological future in the resurrection of the Crucified. Eschatology by Moltmann is an 'eschatologia crucis' (eschatology of the cross).⁴⁸⁴ The message of the cross is the good news not only about the remission of sins, but also about the promise of the new justice.⁴⁸⁵ The history of Jesus Christ leads not only to the justification of humans, but also to the justification of God, to the new creation in justice and to God's glory.⁴⁸⁶ Moltmann says that by virtue of the fellowship of Christ the dead are already in Christ, but the 'eschatological proviso' of the lordship of Christ applies to them too. He speaks about a *sheltering* towards the resurrection which points towards the consummation of the lordship of Christ.⁴⁸⁷

The passion of Christ has an active and a passive side: it is 'the passion of the passionate Christ.' The suffering of Jesus is messianic and apocalyptic suffering. The sufferings of Christ comprise the sufferings of the whole world, and by his resurrection these afflictions become the 'birth pangs of the new world.' Golgotha 'is the anticipation of the end of this world and the beginning of a world that is new. It is the anticipation of the divine judgement out of which the kingdom of righteousness and justice proceeds.'⁴⁸⁸

The acceptance of the godless by Christ himself taking on their abandonment brings the godless into fellowship with Christ and makes it possible for them to follow him.⁴⁸⁹ The Christian identification with Christ is participation in the suffering of God in the world, because it is a participation in His passion of love. And it means participation in the particular suffering of the world, because God has made it His suffering in the cross of His Son.⁴⁹⁰ As participation in Christ's sufferings, the apostolical sufferings are participation in the end-time afflictions of the world.⁴⁹¹

Jesus suffered and died in loneliness, but his followers may suffer and die in his fellowship. 'Hence while it is still true that suffering means being cut off from God, yet within the fellowship of Christ's suffering, suffering is overcome by suffering, and becomes the way to communion with God.'⁴⁹² The

⁴⁸³ *The Crucified God*, p. 246; Cf. J.-H. TÜCK, S. 192.

⁴⁸⁴ M. KORTHAUS: *Kreuzestheologie*, S. 223

⁴⁸⁵ 'remissio peccatorum', 'promissio der neuen Gerechtigkeit.' J. MOLTMANN: *Theologie der Hoffnung*, 1980 (11.), p. 185 – quoted by M. KORTHAUS: *Kreuzestheologie*, p. 225.

⁴⁸⁶ *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 181-183.

⁴⁸⁷ 'Geborgenheit auf die Auferstehung hin', *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, p. 213; *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 191, 193.

⁴⁸⁸ the apocalyptic theology of the sufferings of Christ can be found in *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 151f; quotations: p. 155. The apocalyptic dimension is the horizon of the 'limited time' (expression borrowed from Metz, 'Horizont befristeter Zeit'), the horizon of the end of the time. p. 157; *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, p. 179.

⁴⁸⁹ *The Crucified God*, p. 62; Cf. *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 63; p. 265; 'The poverty and sufferings of Christ are experienced and understood only by participation in his mission and in imitating the task he carried out.' (*The Crucified God*, p. 52) 'Die Armut und die Leiden Christi werden erst auf dem Weg der Teilnahme an seiner Sendung und in der Nachfolge seines Auftrags erfahren und verstanden' (*Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 54). The memory of the Cross calls the followers of Christ also to a critical political existence. Cf. *The Crucified God*, p. 317f; KORTHAUS, p. 261.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. *The Crucified God*, p. 277, 24, Cf. *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 152.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 204.

⁴⁹² D. BONHOEFFER: *The Cost of Discipleship*, SCM Press 1959, p. 81; MOLTMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 56.

knowledge of the hidden presence of God in the godforsaken Christ on the cross gives 'courage to be' despite all annihilating experiences.⁴⁹³

Moltmann writes concerning Auschwitz: *'like the cross of Christ, even Auschwitz is in God himself. Even Auschwitz is taken up into the grief of the Father, the surrender of the Son and the power of the Spirit. That never means that Auschwitz and other grisly places can be justified, for it is the cross that is the beginning of the Trinitarian history of God. As Paul says in I Cor. 15, only with the resurrection of the dead, the murdered and the gassed, only with the healing of those in despair who bear lifelong wounds, only with the abolition of all rule and authority, only with the annihilation of death will the Son hand over the kingdom to the Father.[...] God in Auschwitz and Auschwitz in the crucified God – that is the basis for a real hope which both embraces and overcomes the world, and the ground for love which is stronger than death and can sustain death. He is the reason for living with the terror of history and the end of history, and nevertheless remaining in love and meeting what comes in openness for God's future. He is the reason for living, while bearing guilt and sorrow together, for the future of man in God.'*⁴⁹⁴

Some critical remarks and the question of theodicy

Jan Heiner Tück remarks that the panentheistic suspension of the history of suffering in the Trinitarian history of God may imply a certain need of redemption and development in God himself. Moltmann's conception may carry the danger of dissolving the Immanent Trinity into the history of the world.⁴⁹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar tries to avoid this danger when he formulates his Trinitarian Theology of the Cross.

Like Moltmann, Balthasar and Eberhard Jüngel also speak about God's suffering, although with certain reservations. Jüngel emphasizes that God does not need to become what He is. God's Being is in Becoming. God's suffering is not just a mere passivity, but an expression of His free self-determination, of His choice of love. Also for Moltmann God's suffering is a voluntary suffering out of love.

According to Balthasar the eternal primal kenosis in God is the precondition and the foundation for all economic kenotic acts, such as the creation, the covenant and the cross.⁴⁹⁶ Balthasar interprets

⁴⁹³ Cf. MOLTSMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 335, reference to Paul Tillich (*The Courage to Be*)

⁴⁹⁴ The last part of the quotation in German: *'Er ist der Grund dafür, mit den Schrecken der Geschichte und des Endes der Geschichte zu leben und dennoch in der Liebe zu bleiben und dem Kommenden offen für die Zukunft Gottes entgegenzusetzen. Er ist der Grund dafür, mitschuldig und mitleidend für die Zukunft des Menschen in Gott zu leben.'* (*Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 267); Cf. *'God in Auschwitz and Auschwitz in the crucified God – that is the basis for a real hope which both embraces and overcomes the world, and the ground for love which is stronger than death and can sustain death. It is the ground for living with the terror of history and the end of history, and nevertheless remaining in love and meeting what comes in openness for God's future. It is the ground for living and bearing guilt and sorrow for the future of man in God.'* *The Crucified God*, p. 278.

⁴⁹⁵ *'Dadurch aber, daß der trinitarische Geschichtsprozeß koextensiv zur Weltgeschichte angesetzt wird, fällt die Vollendung Gottes mit dem Ende der Welt zusammen. Die Identifikation Gottes mit dem Drama der Welt droht, die immanente Trinität in die Geschichte aufzulösen und die göttliche Freiheit underlaufen.'* *'Auch Hans Urs von Balthasar hat Moltmanns Theologie attestiert, sie übernehme die »zweideutigkeit Hegels«, wonach Gott sich erst im Durchgang durch die Geschichte also solcher konstituiert.'* J.-H. TÜCK: *Christologie und Theodizee bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 193-194.

⁴⁹⁶ *'Zwischen den göttlichen Personen liegt der Abgrund, innerhalb dessen die irdischen Abgründigkeiten eingeborgen werden können. In Gott ist der Ansatzpunkt für das, was ,Leiden werden kann, wenn die Vorsichtslosigkeit, mit der der Vater sich (und alles Seinige) weggibt [...] auf eine Freiheit stößt, die diese*

the sufferings of Christ in the sense of a vicarious pro-existence for others. In the Cross 'every possible hell' and distance from God is undergirded (*unterfasst*) through God's love.⁴⁹⁷ Balthasar emphasizes that it is only with reservations possible to speak about the suffering of God, about his *passio caritatis*.⁴⁹⁸ He criticizes the all too easy speech about God's suffering: '*The fire of God's eternal love*' towers above all finite that we call passion or suffering.⁴⁹⁹

Karl Rahner and Johann Baptist Metz criticized the notion of the 'suffering God.' Rahner notes: '*To put it crudely, it does not help me escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God to put it bluntly is just as "messed up" as I am.*'⁵⁰⁰ Metz poses some important questions: Is the talk about the suffering God not just a redoubling of human suffering? Is that not an eternalization of suffering? Does it not carry the danger of an aestheticization of suffering? Metz emphasizes the negative mystery of suffering. He criticizes the talk about God's suffering out of a respect for human suffering as well.⁵⁰¹

It is worth considering Metz's warnings of the dangers of talking about God's suffering. One should be aware of the difference between God's suffering and the human history of suffering, and avoid the entanglement of God in history and the redoubling of human suffering. Human suffering should not be simply covered up and suspended theologically.⁵⁰² Taking these reservations into consideration, talking about God's passion is in my opinion possible and legitimate in light of His

Vorsichtslosigkeit nicht beantwortet, sondern in die Vorsicht des Bei-sich-selber-beginnen-Wollens verwandelt. Cf. H. U. von BALTHASAR: *Theodramatik III*, S. 305, 306; TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, S. 197; MENKE: *Stellvertretung*, S. 291/

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. K.-H. MENKE: *Stellvertretung*, p. 302, 295; Cf. H. U. von BALTHASAR: *Theodramatik IV*, 52; *TD IV*, p. 287: *„Stellvertretung für alle sündigen Tode, und deshalb Selbsthingabe in eine Gottverlassenheit und damit Ohnmacht, die jede mögliche Gottverlassenheit und Ohnmacht der Sünder unterfasst. Indem er in seine Todeshingabe alle Sündertode mithinabreißt, wertet er sie und damit auch alles auf solchen Tod hinlaufende Leben in seinen einzig endgültigen Tod um.“*; Cf. MENKE, S. 309 /In Christus gibt es keine Tiefe menschlicher Schuld, die nicht aus einer ‚Stelle‘ der Sünde in eine ‚Stelle‘ der Sohnschaft ‚umgelitten‘ (gesühnt) werden könnte. *‘Die »Stelle«, in der sich [...] alles sammelt, was keine Gemeinschaft mit Gott hat, wird im Geschehen des Karfreitags, Karsamstags und des Auferstehungstages zu einer »Stelle« der Hoffnung.*’; bezüglich der inklusiven Stellvertretung der Christen cf. MENKE, S. 301, 303 /*(Fazit von mir:) Der zu sich (zum Sich-selbst-Geben-Können) befreite Mensch ist einbezogen in die Mit-Sohnschaft mit Christus. Die inklusive Stellvertretung der Kirche (bedingt durch die exklusive Stellvertretung Christi) ist hoffendes Für-einander-Können und Für-einander-Stehen, es ist für-bittendes und für-leidendes Hoffen. Stellvertretung in und mit Christus besteht in Inklusion der eigenen in die je-größere ‚Sendung des vorausgehenden Herrn.*’

⁴⁹⁸ To speak about God's suffering is possible only analogically. /Nach Balthasar ist die Rede über das Verhältnis zwischen immanenter und ökonomischer Trinität, und so auch vom Leiden Gottes, nur als analoge Rede möglich (gewisse Ähnlichkeit, nicht ohne größere Unähnlichkeit; zugleich Einheit und Unterschiedlichkeit). Unter dieser Voraussetzung ist es möglich über Gottes Mitleid zu sprechen, das als *passio caritatis* verstanden werden kann (*caritas* ist dabei ein Freiheitsgeschehen). Cf. K.-H. MENKE: *Stellvertretung*, p. 198/

⁴⁹⁹ BALTHASAR: *Neue Klarstellungen*, Einsiedeln 1985 (2.), p. 156 (quoted by TÜCK, p. 207:) *„Man redet heute allzu leichtfertig davon, dass Gott an den Schmerzen seiner Schöpfung leidet, als könnte nur eine solche Sprache ihn entschuldigen. Man redet auch zu leichtfertig von der Veränderlichkeit Gottes. Man bedenkt zu wenig, dass das Feuer der ewigen Liebe Gottes erhaben ist über das Endliche, das wir Lust und Leid nennen, so wie seine Lebendigkeit erhaben ist über das, was wir als Sein und Werden gegeneinanderstellen.“*

⁵⁰⁰ *„Um - einmal primitiv gesagt – aus meinem Dreck und Schlamassel und meiner Verzweiflung herauszukommen, nützt es mir doch nichts, wenn es Gott – um es einmal grob zu sagen – genauso dreckig geht.“*⁵⁰⁰ K. RAHNER: *Im Gespräch*, 1982, S. 246 – cited by TÜCK, p. 206; English translation from <https://www.galaxie.com/article/caj09-2-01>: *‘To put it crudely, it does not help me to escape from my mess and mix-up and despair if God is in the same predicament.’*

⁵⁰¹ Cf. J. B. METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 117.

⁵⁰² Cf. TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 178.

revelation. It should be added that God's solidarity with us in Jesus Christ does not only mean comfort, but opens up a new horizon.

Is the suffering God the answer to the question of theodicy? Walter Kasper suggests that the sympathetic God revealed in Jesus Christ is the definitive answer on this question and the suffering cannot be an objection against God any more.⁵⁰³ However, Moltmann does not argue so. He speaks about a theodicy process (or theodicy trial, *Theodizeeprozess*), which begins with the resurrection of the crucified Lord and can be completed only eschatologically 'with the resurrection of all the dead and the annihilation of death's power – which is to say through the new creation of all things'. Job's question about God's justice has to be kept open until it finds its reply.⁵⁰⁴ According to Jüngel the question of evil needs to be endured as an unanswerable question in the belief and hope in the God who has revealed himself on the Cross as the God of love.⁵⁰⁵

The omnipotence of God is understood eschatologically by Moltmann.⁵⁰⁶ God is not yet present in the way of being 'all in all' (cf. I Corinthians 15:28). 'God, however, is present in that He stays with the victims and sufferers and comforts them with His eternal fellowship. In the history of this world the lordship of God is still controversial and it is witnessed by the victims and the martyrs, as described in the Revelation of John. But when the glory of God itself moves into creation and His Shekhinah fills and makes everything eternally alive, it will be omnipotent and omnipresent.'⁵⁰⁷ Moltmann refers to the Jewish notion of Shekhinah. This rabbinic concept makes a distinction between God and His 'indwelling' (Shekhinah), expressing the experience of God's compassion, but maintaining also His holiness and exaltedness.⁵⁰⁸ The church father Gregory of Nyssa writes about God's power as follows: 'In the first place, then, the fact that the omnipotent nature should have been capable of descending to the low estate of humanity provides a clearer proof of power than great and supernatural miracles [...] the lofty, coming to exist in lowliness, is seen in this lowliness, and yet descends not from its height.'⁵⁰⁹ Eberhard Jüngel understands God's omnipotence as the

⁵⁰³ 'Der sympathische Gott, wie er in Jesus Christus offenbart wird, ist die endgültige Antwort auf die Theodizeefrage. [...] Wenn Gott selbst leidet, ist das Leiden kein Einwand mehr gegen Gott.' W. KASPER: *Der Gott Jesu Christi*; Mainz 1982, 244 - quoted by TÜCK, p. 176.

⁵⁰⁴ MOLTSMANN: *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 183; *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, p. 205.

⁵⁰⁵ Jüngel differentiates between the *Deus revelatus* and his *opus absconditum*. TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 187-188.

⁵⁰⁶ /Cf. METZ: alle Gottespredikate in der biblischen Tradition einen Verheissungsvermerk haben, und die biblische Seinsaussagen einen Zeitvermerk. *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann*, p. 137/

⁵⁰⁷ 'Gott ist noch nicht so gegenwärtig, dass er »alles in allem« bewirkt, wie Paulus es für das kommende Reich erwartet (1 Kor 15,28). Gott ist aber so gegenwärtig, dass er bei den Opfern und den Leidtragenden wohnt und sie durch seine ewige Gemeinschaft tröstet. In der Geschichte dieser Welt ist die Herrschaft Gottes noch umstritten und wird durch die Opfer und die Märtyrer bezeugt, wie die Offenbarung des Johannes schildert. Wenn aber die Herrlichkeit Gottes selbst in die Schöpfung einzieht und seine Schechina alles erfüllt und ewig lebendig macht, wird sie allmächtig und allgegenwärtig.' MOLTSMANN: 'Die Grube' – 'Wo war Gott?'; in: *Als Gott weinte*, p. 55

⁵⁰⁸ *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 263; Cf. Isaiah 57:15: 'For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.'

⁵⁰⁹ English translation (by J. G. Srawley, SPCK 1917, 77) quoted in: MOLTSMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 281.

power of his love. *'For love is almighty because and only because it can (as Paul says) bear all things, endure all things.'*⁵¹⁰

I find it important to emphasize: the Eschaton does not simply refer to a future final time, but it means the end of time.⁵¹¹ According to Christian belief the eschatological Kingdom of God has dawned in Christ. The eschatological terms are therefore characterized by a tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet.' *'Believers no longer live only in this unredeemed world of death. In that one man the future of the new world of life has already gained power over this unredeemed world of death and has condemned it to become a world that passes away.[...] Jesus' resurrection has already made possible what is impossible yet [...].'*⁵¹² The resurrection does not empty the cross, but fills it with eschatology and saving significance.⁵¹³ The Christian faith in resurrection is eschatological faith. *„The hermeneutic point for the understanding of Christian faith must be [...] sought in the question of righteousness in the history of the suffering world. This is an open question, which can neither be answered nor given up.'*⁵¹⁴

God's suffering and the dawn of His kingdom in Jesus Christ does not simply silence the question to God. It may become even more intense. God's suffering with us is comforting, but at the same time it increases the weight of suffering.⁵¹⁵ Christ's suffering and death exposes and uncovers the depth of evil and confronts us with it. In the light of the dawn of God's Kingdom the call for salvation and justice arises again with new strength and hope.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. 1 Corinthians 13:7; Die Ohnmacht der Liebe konstituiert ihre Allmacht: *'Denn deshalb und nur deshalb ist die Liebe allmächtig, weil sie – wie Paulus formuliert – alles zu erleiden, alles zu ertragen vermag.'* JÜNGEL: *Wertlose Wahrheit*, München 1990, p. 160 – quoted by TÜCK, p. 18; Cf. BALTHASAR: *„Gottes allmächtige Liebe ist schon inintertrinitarisch zugleich Unmacht.'* (TD III, p. 307)

⁵¹¹ *„The future of Christ« does not lie on the line of future time (futurum). It belongs to the coming eternity which will end time (adventus).'* MOLTSMANN: *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 206.

⁵¹² *„Die Glaubenden leben auch nicht mehr nur in dieser unerlösten Welt des Todes. An jedem Einen ist die Zukunft der neuen Welt des Lebens schon dieser unerlösten Welt des Todes mächtig geworden und hat sie zur vergehenden Welt verurteilt. [...] Durch Jesu Auferweckung ist jetzt schon möglich gemacht, was sonst noch unmöglich ist.'* MOLTSMANN: *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 158; Cf. *The Crucified God*, p. 171.

⁵¹³ Cf. MOLTSMANN: *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 170; Cf. *The Crucified God*, p. 182.

⁵¹⁴ *„Der hermeneutische Ort zum Verständnis des christlichen Auferstehungsglauben muss [...] in der offenen, der sowohl unbeantwortbaren wie unaufgebbaren Frage nach Gerechtigkeit in der Leidensgeschichte der Welt gesucht werden.'* MOLTSMANN: *The Crucified God*, p. 178; *Der gekreuzigte Gott*, p. 165.

⁵¹⁵ *„Elie Wiesel hat in dieser rabbinischen Vorstellung von »Gott dem Mitleidenden« Trost gefunden, weil Gott selbst unser Leiden teilt und »geteiltes Leid halbes Leid ist«; er hat aber auch die doppelte Last empfunden, weil wir dann mit unseren menschlichen Leiden auch noch die Leiden Gottes ertragen müssen.'* (MOLTSMANN: *'Die Grube' – 'Wo war Gott?'*; in: *Als Gott weinte*, S. 52)

Memoria passionis and the eschatological question

- Theodicy-sensitive Theology by Johann Baptist Metz

*'Sis eis Deus! Be for them God!
Be for them impossible possibility!'*⁵¹⁶

I'm citing Metz' thoughts which I find fundamental for his theodicy-sensitive theology: *'A hope of Christians, which did not yet secularise to a pure utopia, (in my opinion) cannot leave behind a question, namely this unanswerable and unforgettable question of theodicy, that means the provocation of the Christian hope through the abysmal history of suffering in the world.[...] The Christian pathos of hope stays for me always embedded in a suffering unto God'⁵¹⁷ - [...] to collect all of our conflicting experiences of suffering into this negative form of hope, as suffering unto God, and so to wrest them from the abyss of despair or oblivion'⁵¹⁸ 'and to encourage a new praxis. A new praxis which involves also the ability to accept guilt and the need of conversion.'^{519 520}*

Metz reacts to the challenge of the nameless sufferings in the 20th century with a theology in the form of a query (*Rückfrage*) to God. The eschatological self-legitimation of God is sought after.⁵²¹ Especially the definitely happened and not revisable sufferings are those which demand a theodicy- and time-sensible theology. Metz calls for an anamnestic solidarity with the victims and the dead, which implies the question of their salvation. *'Does the question about the justice for all, that means for the dead too, still worry us? Do the suffered injustices still trouble us [...]?'⁵²²* Theodicy by Metz is understood as a query and question to God, and it does not mean the philosophical attempt to justify God in front of the court chair of the human reason.⁵²³

One cannot talk about God and blank out reality. Metz criticises the insensitivity of theology to the concrete history of suffering. A theology which does not let itself be irritated by the concrete experiences of suffering and evil practices a speculative reconciliation with its back to the history of suffering in the world. The emphasis on the presence of salvation in Christ and the assertion that the question of theodicy is already answered in the Christology, threatens to blank out and bypass the

⁵¹⁶ *'Sis eis Deus! Sei du ihnen Gott! Sei du ihnen die unmögliche Möglichkeit! METZ: Mystik der offenen Augen, p. 149.*

⁵¹⁷ *Leiden an Gott* (Metz) – possible to translate as 'suffering from God' as well. I prefer the translation from J. Matthew Ashley: 'suffering unto God', as it expresses better what Metz means by this idea. It expresses a form of relationship to God and a more dynamic and active state. (http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343852?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

⁵¹⁸ METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 18.

⁵¹⁹ METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 67.

⁵²⁰ *'Eine Hoffnung der Christen, die sich nicht selbst schon zur reinen Utopie säkularisiert hat, kann m. E. eine Frage nicht hinter sich bringen, nämlich diese ebenso unbeantwortbare wie unvergessliche Theodizeefrage, also die Provokation der christlichen Hoffnung durch die abgründige Leidensgeschichte der Welt. [...] Immer bleibt für mich das christliche Hoffnungs-pathos eingebettet in ein Leiden an Gott – [...] um in dieser negativen Gestalt der Hoffnung als Leiden an Gott all unsere widersprüchlichen Leiderfahrungen zu sammeln und sie so dem Abgrung der Verzweigung oder des Vergessens zu entreissen' ' und zu einer neuen Praxis zu ermutigen. Zu einer neuen Praxis, welche die Schuld-fähigkeit und Umkehrbedürftigkeit der Handelnden durchaus einschliesst'*

⁵²¹ TÜCK, p. 219, Cf. METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 57f.

⁵²² METZ: *Mystik der offenen Augen*, p. 133.

⁵²³ Cf. METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 29., 162.

real history of evil and negativity.⁵²⁴ A Resurrection Christology which does not hear the cry of abandonment of the Crucified becomes a myth of victory, a myth of the winners. Metz calls for more reflection on the meaning of Holy Saturday (*Karsamstagchristologie*).

The concentration on the presence of salvation has led to an undervaluation of the messianic-apocalyptic roots of Christianity. Metz wants to rehabilitate the category of the apocalyptic. Apocalyptic awareness means the knowledge of the finitude of time and of the pressing End. Apocalypse means unmasking the reality and unveiling the faces of the victims against the pitiless amnesia of the winners. Apocalyptic hope is a hope for the saving intervention of God at the end of time. The knowledge of the limitation of time qualifies the presence as a privileged moment for a practice of change. *'The time of discipleship is the time of meeting with the Lord whose coming in Maranatha is awaited for. Discipleship and expectation of parousia belong together.'*⁵²⁵

*'An apocalyptic – conscientious Christianity should unite in itself to what the faithfulness to its heritage obliges it: the memory of God in remembrance of the history of human suffering.'*⁵²⁶ Metz' *memoria passionis* is the remembrance of the history of suffering. *'To forget Auschwitz means to become guilty again, to betray the murdered ones once again'* - warns Ginzel.⁵²⁷ This memory is the criterion of a more human future.⁵²⁸ It can lead to peace only then, when it includes not only the remembrance of one's own sufferings, but especially the suffering of others. Such a memory is an expression of love.⁵²⁹

The apocalyptic hope is held by the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Christi*. Metz suggests a narrative-memorative soteriology, which keeps the dangerously liberating memory of salvation alive and protects it argumentatively.⁵³⁰ The memory of the crucified risen Lord enables us to hold on to the hope that the praxis of solidarity is not futile, the suffering of culprits can be lifted up in forgiveness and the life of victims does not fail and end with their death.⁵³¹ This remembrance is dangerous too, because it prevents the premature reconciliation with the 'facts' of our present world.

One cannot commemorate the passion, death and resurrection of Christ without the participation in Christ's identification with the victims and his mission for the lost and sufferers. Belief means at the same time discipleship. *'Only by following Jesus do the Christians know, who is the one whom they*

⁵²⁴ TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 201., 212.

⁵²⁵ *'Die Zeit der Nachfolge wird zur Zeit der Begegnung mit dem Herrn, dessen Kommen im Maranatha erwartet wird. Nachfolge und Naherwartung gehören zusammen.'* TÜCK, p. 146.

⁵²⁶ *'Ein apokalyptisch-gewissenhaftes Christentum muss in sich das zusammenführen, wozu es die Treue zu seinem Erbe zwingt: das Gottesgedächtnis im Eingedenken der Leidensgeschichte der Menschen.'* METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 138.

⁵²⁷ GINZEL: *Vorwort*, in: KOHN: *HaSCHOAH*, Manz-München 1986, 9-13; p. 10, cited by TÜCK, p. 263.

⁵²⁸ Metz appreciates the anamnestic culture of Judaism and the resistance against the premature empty consolations. Cf. TÜCK, S. 164f.

⁵²⁹ Cf. METZ: *Memoria passionis*, S. 55, *Mystik der offenen Augen*, p. 137.

⁵³⁰ Narration and remembering are leading categories, and argumentation has a supporting and critical function. Cf. TÜCK, p. 131, 136. Tück points out that in narration there are already argumentative moments (narration and argumentation are mutually interrelated).

⁵³¹ TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 134.

trust and who saves them.⁵³² The Christian hope calls us to be there for the others and 'to change the life of others through solidary and substituting suffering.'⁵³³

The discipleship has both mystical and political dimensions. 'A mysticism, which does not translate itself into political expressions, remains empty; a politics, which does not owe itself to mystical orientation, stays blind.'⁵³⁴ The mysticism of discipleship is a *mysticism of the opened eyes*, which obliges us to attentive perception of foreign suffering. It is also a *mysticism of compassion*, where the affection to God and the affection to others create an inseparable unity.⁵³⁵

This mysticism of compassion is often at the same time the accepted experience of a 'suffering unto God' (*Leiden an Gott*).⁵³⁶ Metz grounds this *mysticism of suffering unto God* in Israel's tradition of prayer and in Jesus' mysticism of God. The biblical Israel could be described as a 'landscape of cries' (N. Sachs). Jesus' 'cry is the cry of the Godforsaken, who himself has never forsaken God. [...] Jesus holds on to God; in the godforsakenness of the cross he affirms a God, who is still differently and who is different from the echo of our desires, however ardent they may be; who is still more and other than the answer to our questions, however hard and passionate they may be'⁵³⁷ Israel's and Jesus' passion of God is a passion for God and a passion unto God (a passion unto God as maintaining the difference between our speech about God and God himself, as an admission of our lack of ability to know and to say⁵³⁸). God is there in Jesus' and Israel's cry for God, (even more:) He is first of all *there* - in this cry.⁵³⁹ During Easter Jesus appears to those who want to see him. God comes close to those, who are *missing* Him.⁵⁴⁰

Suffering is a reason for laments which call out for the saving God where the praxis of solidarity reaches its limits.⁵⁴¹ According to Metz the recovery of the biblical laments and a speech to God in the form of the theodicy-question, as a cry for salvation, are of crucial importance.⁵⁴² A suffering unto God lets itself be irritated by the catastrophes of the world. Prayer becomes an expression of missing God (*Gebet des Gott-Vermissens*).⁵⁴³ 'Prayer will be experienced and understood as a cry not

⁵³² 'Nur ihm nachfolgend wissen Christen, auf wen sie sich eingelassen haben und wer sie rettet.' METZ: *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, Mainz 1977, p. 64. - cited by TÜCK, p. 140.

⁵³³ 'das Leben anderer durch solidarisches und stellvertretendes Leiden zu verwandeln.' METZ: *Mystik der offenen Augen*, p. 89., p. 132.

⁵³⁴ 'Mystik, die sich nicht in politische Ausdrucksformen übersetzt, bleibt leer; Politik, die sich nicht mystischer Orientierung verdankt, blind.' TÜCK, p. 143.

⁵³⁵ *Gottleidenschaft, die sich als Mitleidenschaft erfährt und bewährt.* METZ: *Mystik der offenen Augen*, p. 59.

⁵³⁶ METZ: *Mystik der offenen Augen*, p. 59.

⁵³⁷ Jesu 'Schrei ist der Schrei jenes Gottverlassenen, der seinerseits Gott nie verlassen hatte [...] Jesus hält der Gottheit stand; in der Gottverlassenheit des Kreuzes bejaht er einen Gott, der noch anders und anderes ist als das Echo unserer Wünsche, und wären sie noch so feurig; der noch mehr und anderes ist als die Antwort auf unsere Fragen, und wären sie die härtesten und leidenschaftlichsten.'

⁵³⁸ Leiden an Gott als Offenhaltung der Differenz zwischen unserer Rede über Gott und Gott selbst, als Eingeständnis des Nichtwissens und Nichtsagenkönnens

⁵³⁹ 'Auch in diesem Schrei und vor allem in ihm ist Gott »da.«' METZ: *Memoria passionis*, S. 68., Cf. TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 205; (METZ: *Theologie als Theodizee?*, in: *Theodizee – Gott vor Gericht?*, Hrsg. W. Oelmüller, p. 114.)

⁵⁴⁰ METZ: *Mystik der offenen Augen*, S. 131 'Ist er uns also am Ende nur deswegen noch nicht begegnet, haben wir ihn nur deswegen (noch) nicht geschaut, weil wir ihn eigentlich nicht vermisst haben?'

⁵⁴¹ TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, p. 218

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵⁴³ METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 94; cf. p. 98.

by those, who do not believe in the Christian message of the resurrection, but exactly by those, who do believe in it – with their face turned to the world.⁵⁴⁴ The question to God is an expression of the Christian belief and hope. It is a query (*Rückfrage*) to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the God of Jesus Christ.

Some critical remarks on Metz' theology

Metz' conception of the narrative-memorative theology remained rather fragmental. In his work about Metz, Jan Heiner Tück tries to reflect more on the soteriological implications of Christ's passion, cross and resurrection, as well.⁵⁴⁵ He notes the danger of the one-sided emphases: On the one hand, the emphasis on the presence of salvation carries the danger of fading out the real history of evil and suffering. On the other hand, the emphasis on the unredeemed state of the world can lead to a theology of lament which diminishes the significance of the Golgotha.⁵⁴⁶

Eschatology has fundamental meaning in the Christian faith. The eschatological Christian faith is constitutively related to the historical manifestation of the eschatological salvation in Jesus Christ. The eschatological tension of 'already – not yet' should be maintained. Metz' important note on this: *'In the horizon of the limitedness of time I can tell that something definite and irrevocable has happened. In the horizon of an unlimited time [...] there is actually nothing definitive. [...] the talk about the definitive presence of salvation presupposes a specific understanding of time, which cannot be simply explained by the common talk about past – presence – future.'*⁵⁴⁷

Metz criticises the silencing of the question of theodicy in the Augustinian teaching about the human freedom and in the newer attempts of Trinitarian theology.⁵⁴⁸ By Augustine the man and his sin are in the centre. Metz emphasises the need of confession and repentance for one's own sin and guilt as necessary for salvation.⁵⁴⁹ However, he concentrates on the suffering of the innocents, victims and dead.⁵⁵⁰ The question of the salvation of sinners does not stand for him so much in focus as the question of past sufferings and the salvation of victims.⁵⁵¹

Moltmann in his book *The Way of Jesus Christ* emphasizes the role of memory and he refers often to Metz. The belief of Israel is a remembered hope. Hope and remembrance are connected also in the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is the memory of the sufferings and death of Christ, and this memory opens up the horizon of the eschatological Kingdom of God.⁵⁵² *'The meal of remembrance holds up Christ's sufferings to God, reminding him of the afflictions of his messiah and calling for his*

⁵⁴⁴ *'Das Gebet wird nicht etwa von denen als Schrei erlebt und verstanden, die nicht an die christliche Auferstehungsbotschaft glauben, sondern von denen, die gerade an die Botschaft glauben – mit dem Gesicht zur Welt.'* Ibid., p. 107.

⁵⁴⁵ *Thesen zu einer theodizee-nahen Christologie.* TÜCK, p. 219. und 222ff.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., S. 201

⁵⁴⁷ METZ, in: *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann*, S. 140

⁵⁴⁸ Cf. TÜCK: *Christologie und Theologie bei Johann Baptist Metz*, S. 168ff.

⁵⁴⁹ He criticizes the tendency of excusions and unacknowledging of guilt, which leads to searching for alibis. Cf. TÜCK, p. 126f.

⁵⁵⁰ Vgl. METZ: *Memoria passionis*, S. 57; *Mystik der offenen Augen*, S. 56. Metz emphasises often, that the first glimpse of Jesus was directed not at the sin, but at the suffering of others. Cf. J.B. Metz, J. Reikerstorfer, J. Werbick: *Gottesrede*, LIT, Münster 1997, p. 11.

⁵⁵¹ Cf. TÜCK (Ibid.), S. 151;

⁵⁵² MOLTSMANN: *Der Weg Jesu Christi*, p. 228 – 230.

*deliverance.*⁵⁵³ The memory of the sufferings of Christ comprises all in whose fellowship Jesus suffers and whom he draws into his fellowship through his sufferings.⁵⁵⁴

*'Suffering, which causes us to cry and finally to be miserably hushed up, has no grandeur; it has no greatness, no majesty, it is in his roots everything else than strong sympathetic compassion, it is not simply a sign of love, but rather an alarming signal of not being able to love any more. It is a suffering, which leads to nothingness, if it is not a suffering unto God.'*⁵⁵⁵ I find these strong words of Metz about the reality of suffering justified, but one-sided. Suffering can take the sufferer into the depth of hell. However, suffering itself is not the evil, but rather its consequence. There is suffering which does not lead into nothingness: I would add to Metz's *suffering unto God* also the *suffering with God*. It is an accepted and solidary suffering, a suffering which overcomes suffering. In such suffering the absurdity of evil loses its footing.

I find it important to note some subtle differences. There are open wounds which may always remain a cause for lament and appeal to God. However, I think it is possible for the wounded ones to find a certain meaning in their suffering, even if the cry and appeal to God still remains. It is not the suffering itself which has this meaning. Finding sense in the situation of insurmountable suffering can be a protest against the absurdity and means the preservation of humanness.⁵⁵⁶ This sense can and should not be assigned on the sufferer from outsiders.

Human guilt and sin should not be faded out. It has to be identified, without blocking the question to God.⁵⁵⁷ Concerning the question of theodicy I find it very important not to forget that God has questions to us too: *Adam, where are you? Kain, where is your brother?* Neither man, nor God should be spared, precisely in the interest of God and in the interest of man. It is important is to hold out the question of theodicy in watchful belief and hope, and to be prepared to hear God's question to us people, as well.

Concerning the unanswerability of the question of theodicy I agree with Metz *'that the Christian religion is not there to make all the questions answerable, but to make our unanswerable questions unforgettable. In this sense the believers do not necessarily have an answer, but even a further question which they can transform into prayer, into prayers which can lead not only to jubilation, but also to a (silent) cry.'*⁵⁵⁸ Metz says that to pray means asking God for God (*Gott um Gott zu bitten*). It

⁵⁵³ MOLTSMANN: *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 211.

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. MOLTSMANN: *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p. 211

⁵⁵⁵ *'Leiden, das uns schreien und schließlich kläglich verstummen lässt, kennt keine Hoheit; es ist nichts Großes, nichts Erhabenes, es ist in seinen Wurzeln alles andere als ein starkes solidarisches Mitleiden, es ist nicht einfach Zeichen der Liebe, sondern weit mehr erschreckendes Anzeichen dafür, nicht mehr lieben zu können. Es ist jenes Leid, das ins Nichts führt, wenn es nicht ein Leiden an Gott ist.'* METZ; *Plädoyer für mehr Theodizee-Empfindlichkeit in der theologie*, in: *Wovon man nicht schweigen kann*, Hrsg. W. Oelmüller, München 1992, p. 135. - Cited by TÜCK (Ibid.), p. 178.

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. suffering as a task - VIKTOR E. FRANKL: *...és mégis mondj Igent az Életre! Egy pszichológus megéli a koncentrációs tábor*, Budapest 1988 (*...trotzdem Ja zum Leben sagen. Ein Psychologe erlebt das Konzentrationslager*, München 1979), p. 84, 88; Cf. V. E. FRANKL: *A szenvedő ember, Homo patiens*

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. TÜCK, S. 175.

⁵⁵⁸ *'dass christliche Religion nicht dazu da ist, um alle Fragen für uns beantwortbar zu machen, sondern um von uns unbeantwortbare Fragen unvergesslich zu machen. In diesem Sinn haben Glaubende nicht unbedingt eine Antwort, sondern gerade auch eine Frage zuviel, die sie in Gebete verwandeln können, in Gebete, die nicht nur im Jubel, sondern auch in (lautlose) Schrei münden können'* METZ: *Mystik der offenen Augen*, S. 159

means to call Him in His holiness that is always greater and different from our ideas. And it means to call Him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the God of Jesus Christ.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. METZ: *Memoria passionis*, p. 96f.

The Challenge of Suffering. Job and Concluding Reflections

The Unforgettable Questions of Job

*'O you wind rose of torment! [...]
To the worms and the fishes your voice has gone.
Job, you have wept through all the watches of the night
But some day the star sign of your blood will
Outshine all the rising suns.'* (Nelly Sachs)⁵⁶⁰

The case of Job (Ayyub) may be found in Jewish, Christian as well as Muslim traditions. The rabbis say: even if Job did not exist, the days and nights of his anguish cannot be undone. He lives again and again, a thousand times.⁵⁶¹ Job is an example of the innocent sufferers and the *'loneliness in suffering, before God and people.'*⁵⁶² The case of Job is a demonstration of a very old human as well as theological problem.⁵⁶³

In the Old Testament version of Job's story it can be distinguished between the frame story and the dialogues. According to the frame story, suffering is seen as a test of belief. God allows Satan to put the devout Job to a test through suffering. Job seems to be a patient sufferer. In the dialogical middle part of the book, Job fights with God and argues with his friends. For the four friends the retribution principle stands unshaken by Job's experience. They understand suffering as a kind of punishment for the sins (aiming at purification and conversion), or sometimes as a warning, or an instrument of divine communication. Job insists on His innocence and does not accept the injustice of his suffering. He laments and questions God, demanding His response. Job is rewarded by 'seeing God' (and at the end rewarded also in material terms), while the friends get criticised for telling Job what the religious explanation of his suffering is.⁵⁶⁴ The Book of Job challenges the doctrine of retribution and leaves the question of the sense of suffering open. Though the questions of Job stay unanswered in God's reply to him, he may hope that the Creator is ultimately in control. The book refers to the incomprehensibility of the Creator, but it shows also: God does not leave the truthful Job. It is not by chance that God is named *JHWH* when He replies to Job, though in the part of dialogues He was called previously almost exclusively⁵⁶⁵ by different names (*El, Shaddai*). The name *JHWH* refers to the story in Exodus 3: God revealed Himself to Moses and promised the salvation of His people.⁵⁶⁶

The Koran reduces the story of Job to the aspect of forbearance in belief. *'And Ayub, when he cried to his Lord, (saying): Harm has afflicted me, and Thou art the most Merciful of the merciful. (Surah 21:83)*⁵⁶⁷ The questioning and revolting Job is missing here.⁵⁶⁸ The Koran does not permit any form of

⁵⁶⁰ Quotations from the poem of NELLY SACHS: *Hiob*, in: G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unsere Zeitgenosse*, p. 185, Englisch translation: <https://nellysachsenglish.wordpress.com/>

⁵⁶¹ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 29-30, p. 40.

⁵⁶² *'Hiob: die Einsamkeit im Leiden, vor Gott und den Menschen.'* E. WIESEL: *Kolvillág*, p. 120; quoted in: B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesels Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 87.

⁵⁶³ Cf. G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unsere Zeitgenosse*, p. 347.

⁵⁶⁴ O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 27.

⁵⁶⁵ An exception is Job 12:9.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. LANGENHORST, p. 336f, E. ZENGER, *Durchkreuztes Leben*, p. 42.

⁵⁶⁷ Mohammed Habib Shakir translation, <http://en.noblequran.org/quran/surah-al-anbiya/ayat-83/>

⁵⁶⁸ KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 128.

such piety, let alone one that accuses God.⁵⁶⁹ In Islamic tradition, first of all, the unconditional trust in God is emphasized.⁵⁷⁰ However, some Sufis adopted the Job motif in its Old Testament breadth, ignoring thus the Koranic restriction. A wider story of Job, including his lament and his curses upon being, was known from the *Histories of the Prophets (qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā)* and from some Koranic commentaries.⁵⁷¹ A pre-biblical Job legend may have been also preserved in the Arab folklore.⁵⁷² The mystic and poet Attar does not mention Job's attitude of patient forbearance.⁵⁷³ On the contrary, many rebellious Job motifs are present in Attar's *Book of Suffering*. Similarly to Job, Attar's fools protest against God, but they do not turn away from Him and do not renounce Him.⁵⁷⁴ It is their love to God that makes them fight with Him.

Jürgen Ebach emphasizes that Job's words in the biblical framework story: '*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord*' have to be read in the context of the whole book.⁵⁷⁵ The biblical book of Job shows that a truly religious attitude does not consist of passive resignation to misfortune, but includes courage to enter into confrontation with God.⁵⁷⁶ As Martin Buber says, Job is a 'faithful rebel.'⁵⁷⁷ Erich Zenger calls Job's attitude a praying revolt.⁵⁷⁸ It is a wrestling with God within a dialogue with Him.⁵⁷⁹ Job turns from God – to God.⁵⁸⁰ Lament and revolt are here moments of belief.⁵⁸¹ They are expressions of a fight with God – for God.

Elie Wiesel did not like Job's apparent surrender at the end of the book and its happy ending. He interprets later Job's silence as a revolutionary and protesting silence.⁵⁸² Job '*embodies the unquenched seeking for justice and truth, he has never bowed his neck.*'⁵⁸³ The questioning Job motif is constantly present in Elie Wiesel's work. What I find very important and what is remarkable about Job is that he is prepared both to accept the greatness of God and at the same time to demand a response from God to the apparent injustices in the world.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. Surah 68:48. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 129.

⁵⁷⁰ Cf. A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 209.

⁵⁷¹ Cf. e.g. the Koran commentator Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd az-Zamahšarī (d. 1144)

⁵⁷² KERMANI: *Der Schrecken Gottes*, p. 167f; KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 130; Cf. S. SCHERINER: *Der Prophet Ayyūb und das Theodizee-Problem im Islam*, in: *Prüfung oder Pries der Freiheit?*, pp. 57f.

⁵⁷³ He mentions him in *The Book of God*, referring to him as the one who is tormented by God so that he might groan. KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 137.

⁵⁷⁴ KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 162; Cf. KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils auf der Welt*, in: *Das Böse*, pp. 110f.

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. J. EBACH: *Streiten mit Gott. Hiob. Teil 1*, p. 25f.

⁵⁷⁶ *Word Biblical Commentary. Job 1-20.* (DAVID J. A. CLINES)

⁵⁷⁷ 'treue Rebell', quoted in G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 215.

⁵⁷⁸ E. ZENGER, *Durchkreuztes Leben*, p. 26.

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. FRIEDMAN, quoted in B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 89.

⁵⁸⁰ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 38.

⁵⁸¹ Cf. KERMANI: *Islamische Deutungen des Unheils auf der Welt*, in: *Das Böse*, p. 116.

⁵⁸² Cf. B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesel's Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 90; G. LANGENHORST: '*Zuviel warum gefragt*', p. 215-218; G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 202 - 207.

⁵⁸³ '*Er verkörpert das ungestillte Suchen nach Gerechtigkeit und Wahrheit, er hat nie den Nacken gebeugt.*' E. WIESEL, quoted in G. LANGENHORST: '*Zuviel warum gefragt*', in *Angesichts des Leids an Gott glauben?*, p. 219.

⁵⁸⁴ O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 25.

The Book of Job shows that the relationship with God is not based upon a simple reward-and-punishment level, but it lies far deeper than that.⁵⁸⁵ According to Martin Buber Job holds on fast to God in the time of the eclipse of God (*Gottesfinsternis*), he insists on contact with God. The response he receives is the mystery of God's nearness. God enters into a dialogue with him. *'The true answer that Job receives is God's appearance only, only that distance turns to nearness, that »his eyes see Him,« that He knows him again. Nothing is explained, nothing adjusted; wrong has not become right, nor cruelty kindness. Nothing has happened but that man again hears God's address.'*⁵⁸⁶ There is no rational explanation given about suffering, but Job's choice of life after his afflictions is an expression of an ultimate trust.⁵⁸⁷

The sufferings of Job are sometimes seen as prefiguring and representing the travails of the Jewish people.⁵⁸⁸ Elie Wiesel writes: *'Job was not Jewish; but his ordeal concerns all humanity, just as the suffering of the Jewish people ought to concern all humanity.'*⁵⁸⁹ In Christian traditions Job has been read typologically as prefiguring Christ. They both suffer innocently. It is noteworthy that the biblical Job's fortunes are restored after He intercedes for his friends, who would have been otherwise judged by God. An important difference between Job and the suffering servant from Isaiah 53 (seen in Christianity as pointing to Christ) is that the suffering servant commits himself freely and suffers for the healing of others.

Karl Barth reads Job as a type and witness to Jesus Christ, the true witness.⁵⁹⁰ Job is a free servant of a free God, he is an example of man's liberation through and for the free God. According to Barth, in the relation between Job and God the 'for free' ('for nought', *umsonst*) is of central importance.⁵⁹¹ Only in such freedom there is place for mercy.

For Hans Küng the Book of Job shows the ultimate incomprehensibility of God, but also the possibility that it is possible to trust God 'in spite of all'. Job questions and rebels (and he has right to do that), but this protest does not exclude the possibility of an ultimate trust in God.⁵⁹² According to Küng what was confirmed in the Book of Job, becomes in Jesus Christ definitively manifest: also the suffering is embraced by God, and despite its godforsakenness it can become a place for encountering God.⁵⁹³

Job's question is an open question. Does the cross of Christ give an answer to it? Navid Kermani writes: *'That is exactly what Job experiences: not only suffering, to which Christianity gave a decisive response in the form of the cross, but also its injustice, the God-willed injustice to which even the*

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 23; Heschel quotes the Hasidic master rabbi Kotzker, who was in many ways a successor of Job, and for whom the cardinal evil was falsehood: *'Even if reversal were to occur in the divine order, whereby I would be punished for observing a divine commandment and rewarded for transgression, even so I would not swerve from my path and would serve God as before.'* A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 279.

⁵⁸⁶ BUBER: *An der Wende (At the Turning)*, quoted in G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 214; https://books.google.cz/books?id=0o0UC3MiG0gC&source=gbs_navlinks_s (p. 142); Cf. LEAMAN, p. 182f.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 345.

⁵⁸⁸ O. LEAMAN: *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, p. 28.

⁵⁸⁹ E. WIESEL, quoted in *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 190.

⁵⁹⁰ G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 359; <http://gradworks.umi.com/35/15/3515712.html>.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 359 - 361.

⁵⁹² Cf. HANS KÜNG: *Das Judentum* (1991), G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 381 – 383.

⁵⁹³ *'Auch das Leiden ist von Gott umfassen, auch das Leid kann bei aller Gottverlassenheit Ort der Gottesbegegnung werden.'* H. KÜNG: *Christ sein*, quoted in G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 382.

cross provides no answer.⁵⁹⁴ However, Kermani does not really reflect on the Christian understanding of sin and Jesus Christ's saving sacrifice for the world and his resurrection. It is right that in Christianity there is no theoretical answer to the question of innocent suffering. The question of theodicy is an open question, though with a different accentuation. *Why sin and the fallenness of the world that causes so much suffering?* And especially the eschatological question: *How long still, Lord?*

Responses to the Challenge of Evil and Suffering

Paul Ricoeur emphasises that the problem of evil is not just a speculative problem: *'It requires a convergence of thinking, acting (in both the ethical and political senses) and a spiritual transformation of our feelings and emotions.'*⁵⁹⁵ Even if it is not possible to give a final solution, the confrontation with evil and suffering demands our responses, which have crucial meaning. In conclusion, I would like to reflect shortly upon some responses to evil and suffering, taking into consideration the experiences and views of the theologians and authors mentioned in this work.

Thinking about the problem of evil and theodicy

*'I do not have any answers, but I have some very good questions.'*⁵⁹⁶

As Ricoeur says, on the level of thinking the problem of evil is a challenge, in a sense that thinking can continually enrich itself: *'A challenge is turn by turn a failure for syntheses which are always premature and a provocation to think more and differently.'* From the enigma of evil becomes an aporia, a terminal difficulty *'produced by the very work of thinking, where this work is not abolished but rather included in the aporia.'*⁵⁹⁷ The attempts to give response to the problem of evil and suffering on the level of thinking have their large importance for the responses on the levels of acting and feeling too.

In theology, the question of evil and suffering has much to do with our understanding and relationship with God. The question of theodicy confronts our trust in God with the reality of evil and suffering. The belief in God, who is understood to be the source of life and goodness in creation, shows even more strongly the scandal of evil and suffering. As Heschel says, theodicy is a problem for God, not only for man.⁵⁹⁸ There may be attempts of answering this problem, but their specific characteristic is that they do not dissolve the question.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁴ KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 13; German original: p. 24.

⁵⁹⁵ P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, in: *JAAR 1986 LIII (4)*, p. 358.

⁵⁹⁶ E. WIESEL. Quoted in B. WOLFSBERGER: *Interpretation zu Elie Wiesels Der Prozess von Schamgorod*, p. 88; Leaman writes concerning Wiesel: *'Perhaps he is correct in thinking that it does not much matter whether we ever get an answer provided that our life remains open to such an answer.'* LEAMAN, p. 212.

⁵⁹⁷ P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, in: *JAAR 1986 LIII (4)*, p. 358.

⁵⁹⁸ A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 300.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. K.-J. KUSCHEL: *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p.90.

By putting the question of theodicy, the reality of evil is recognized. The negativity and scandal of evil should not be trivialized.⁶⁰⁰ Nor should evil be functionalized. If evil is understood as an absence of good, it has to be emphasized that this absence is also a lie, robbery and destructive aggression.⁶⁰¹

Expressed in a simplified way, we may distinguish between some basic possibilities of a theoretical theodicy in the monotheistic religions: either the incomprehensibility of God is emphasized, or the omnipotence of God is reinterpreted or relativized, or the goodness of God is questioned or seen in a new way. Suffering may be interpreted in different ways too.⁶⁰² Al-Ghazali tries to give explanations for the imperfections in the world (which is as good as possible),⁶⁰³ emphasizing God's goodness and omnipotence, but he knows about the ultimate mystery too. Attar's fools doubt about God's goodness and justice, but they confront God with their laments and hold on to Him. Hans Jonas finds a new answer to the old question of Job by refusing God's omnipotence. *'This, too, so it seems to me, is an answer to Job: that in him God himself suffers.'*⁶⁰⁴ Jürgen Moltmann speaks about God's suffering with His creation, but he does not give up God's powerfulness, and he interprets the omnipotence and omnipresence of God eschatologically. However, the question of theodicy remains ultimately open. Elie Wiesel and Johann Baptist Metz emphasise this openness of the question, which is directed to God.

As Hans Küng says, there is no theoretical human answer to the problem of theodicy.⁶⁰⁵ The human answer can only be a waiting for theodicy. However, the question itself as a question to God and to men should not be given up. Elie Wiesel knew about the unanswerability of the question of Auschwitz, but he did not give up the questions and the wrestling for justice and truth. The Book of Job is an example of such wrestling with God and questioning Him. Only such an open question to God keeps the hope open for an end of the history of suffering. This hope gives strength for action and helps to deal with inevitable sufferings.

J. B. Brantschen writes: *'And yet – as Epicurus already knew – theoretical reasoning has to fail when confronted with suffering. For theologians nothing else remains in this situation, but to encourage Christians to a practice of resistance against suffering and to provide some elements of an answer which might help to hope with and despite the human history of suffering. [...] We cannot and we do not need to justify God. God will justify himself.'*⁶⁰⁶ The open question of theodicy, like the words of

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. *Das Gegenteil von Gleichgültigkeit ist Erinnerung*, p. 157, 163.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. LEHMAN, p. 69, 72

⁶⁰² Cf. KERMANI: *Der Schrecken Gottes*, pp. 108f; pp. 123ff; K. von STOSCH: *Einführung in die Systematische Theologie*, p. 105.

⁶⁰³ I see by al-Ghazali the danger of functionalising evil.

⁶⁰⁴ H. JONAS: *The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice*; quotation p. 13.

⁶⁰⁵ G. LANGENHORST: *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse*, p. 335.

⁶⁰⁶ *'Und doch – das wusste schon Epikur – muss die theoretische Vernunft vor dem Leiden scheitern. Dem Theologen bleibt in dieser Situation nichts anderes übrig, als die Christen zur Praxis des Widerstandes zu ermutigen und einige Antwortelemente bereitzustellen, die es erlauben, mit und trotz der menschlichen Leidensgeschichte zu hoffen. [...] Wir können und brauchen Gott nicht zu rechtfertigen. Gott wird sich selber rechtfertigen.'* J. B. BRANTSCHEN, cited in: A. LOICHINGER, A. KREINER: *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 145.

Büchner's Lenz, is a call both to God and to men: *„But me, if I were allmighty, do you see, if I were omnipotent, I couldn't bear people suffering, I would save them, save them.“*⁶⁰⁷

The response of acts

*‘Where is God? Wherever one lets Him in.’
‘When two people love each other, God is there.’*⁶⁰⁸

*‘The response, not the solution, of action is to act against evil’ - writes Ricoeur. Evil is above all what ought not to be, but which must be fought against. Before accusing God or speculating about the origins of evil, we are to act ethically and politically against it. ‘To do evil is to make another person suffer. Violence, in this sense, constantly recreates the unity of moral evil and suffering. Hence, any action, whether ethical or political, that diminishes the quantity of violence exercised by some human beings over against other human beings diminishes the amount of suffering in the world. If we were to remove the suffering inflicted by people on other people, we would see what remained of suffering in the world, but to tell the truth, we have no idea of what this would be, to such an extent does human violence impregnate suffering.’*⁶⁰⁹

A central idea in Judaism is the covenant between God and man. In such a relationship the conduct of men is of great importance. Heschel writes: *‘[...] the problem of anthropodicy and theodicy cannot be separated. The cardinal issue, Why does the God of justice and compassion permit evil to persist? Is bound up with the problem of how man should aid God so that His justice and compassion prevail.’* God's response is the promise of messianic redemption. However, a promise does not mean an escape to the future. Heschel writes about the Hasidic wisdom: *„All he [rabbi Kotzker] had, as we have today, is a promise and expectation. The waiting goes on. However, mere waiting may be a moratorium, a way of marking time, postponing our response to the challenge. The task is never to forget that by each sacred deed we commit, by each word we hallow, by each thought we chant, we render our modest part in reducing distress and advancing redemption.’*⁶¹⁰ According to Christians God's salvation has broken into the world in Jesus Christ. The gift of the Holy Spirit enables a new birth and life for the Kingdom of God. In Jesus Christ it became manifest that the battle against evil is God's own undertaking, and our own struggles against it make us *‘co-belligerents with God’* (Ricoeur).⁶¹¹

There are sufferings which cannot be prevented by our fight against violence and other evil causes. Helping others who are suffering, compassion and avoiding being imprisoned in one's own suffering are ways of acting against evil too. The cry to God and the acceptance of inevitable and necessary sufferings in love and belief in the Saviour who suffers with us are also responses which do not allow the evil to take power in the situations of suffering.

⁶⁰⁷ BÜCHNER: *Complete Plays, Lenz and Other Writings*, p. 162, quoted in KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 148.

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.* (Where charity and love are, God is there.) The first quotation is from a Hasidic master, cited by Elie Wiesel. Both quotations from E. WIESEL, in: *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 94 and 101.

⁶⁰⁹ P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, in: *JAAR 1986 LIII (4)*, p. 359.

⁶¹⁰ A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 299.

⁶¹¹ P. RICOEUR (Ibid.), p. 357.

Lamenting to God and wrestling with God

*'Perhaps it is God's will that man give Him no rest...
that he cooperate in seeking a way out of the tragic entanglements.'*⁶¹²

The biblical laments (in Psalms, in the Book of Job) are not just reflections of one's own suffering, but they are expressions of a resistance against it. The misery is cried out to God. Claus Westermann writes: *'The true function of the lament is supplication; it is the means by which suffering comes before the One who can take it away. Seen from this perspective, we can say that the lament as such is a movement toward God.'*⁶¹³ Only when God's responsibility and His power over the evil are acknowledged, can salvation be demanded from Him.⁶¹⁴ The condition of such appealing laments is not so much an idea of omnipotence, but rather the experience of the power of the Creator who maintains and redeems life from destruction (Psalm 103:4).⁶¹⁵ Only if God is Lord over evil, can we ask Him: *'Deliver us from evil.'* The cry to God and calling Him for responsibility has to be joined with the self-critical admission of our own responsibilities too.

The wrestling with God was present especially in Judaism. *'The refusal to accept the harshness of God's ways in the name of His love was an authentic form of prayer.'*⁶¹⁶ The reason why it was more present in Judaism is given to a large extent by the personal and covenantal relationship with God. The Covenant extends the dimension of partnership even by the dimension of lawsuit or legal process. If God has a case against His people, the same may be said about their relation to God.⁶¹⁷ In the Book of Job or in Elie Wiesel's *The Trial of God*, the complaint is elevated to the level of a suit against God. According to Hasidic story Levi Jitzchak suspected God of not keeping the end of the bargain, of deceiving humans: *'Know that if Your reign does not bring grace and mercy, Your throne will not be a throne of truth!'*⁶¹⁸ The battle with God is at the same time a battle for the sake of God and His creation. In the tradition of Christianity the fighting with God did not have such a place, which is caused – in my opinion – partly by the specificity of the Christian message. In the Islamic tradition – despite the distrust of the more orthodox quarters – the topos of quarrelling with God appeared first of all in the mystical literature (cf. Attar), although with some differences given by the less personal relationship to God and other distinctions between the Jewish and Islamic belief. Navid Kermani in his book *The Terror of God* appreciates this form of spirituality.

The lament to God and the fight with Him are expressions of the resistance against injustices and against evil. In Judaism (and Christianity) important grounds for the appeal are God's promises and the experience of God's saving acts in history. In Christianity the cry to God – in the light of the advent of God's Kingdom in Jesus Christ – is the impatience of hope.⁶¹⁹ In Jesus Christ the victory is

⁶¹² A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 300.

⁶¹³ C. WESTERMANN, quoted in JANOWSKI, p. 46; English translation:
https://books.google.cz/books?id=DOTim0bzvg8C&source=gbs_navlinks_s

⁶¹⁴ Cf. K-J. KUSCHEL. *Die Auseinandersetzung der Theologie mit dem Übel in der Geschichte der Kirche*, in: *Wozu das Leid? Wozu das Böse?*, p. 84.

⁶¹⁵ BALDERMANN: *Wer hört mein Weinen?*, p. 78.

⁶¹⁶ A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 265.

⁶¹⁷ P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, p. 349

⁶¹⁸ E. WIESEL: *Souls on fire*, p. 10; quoted in KERMANI: *The Terror of God*, p. 184.

⁶¹⁹ Cf. P. RICOEUR (*Ibid.*), p. 360.

already won over evil, but the full manifestation of this victory is missing yet. The Christian cry has its origin in the cry of the psalmist: *'How long O Lord?'*⁶²⁰

The peace given by God's nearness or the presence of Jesus Christ does not exclude – on the contrary, even calls for – the protest and resistance against evil. Buber writes concerning Job: *'My God will not allow to become silent in the mouth of His creature the complaint about the great injustice in the world, and when in an unchanged world His creature yet finds peace, only because God has again granted him His nearness, he confirms Him. Peace, I say; but that is a peace compatible with the fight for justice in the world.'*⁶²¹

Is there any sense?

*'It is when bursting with God's sighs that we are touched by the awareness that beyond all absurdity there is meaning, Truth, and love.'*⁶²²

There is a limit of human understanding, but it is trust, which keeps the believer on the way to God. Bonhoeffer writes in his morning prayer: *'I do not understand your ways, / But you know the way for me.'*⁶²³ I'm quoting Heschel: *'In faith we can accept that there is meaning beyond absurdity, a meaning which is supra rationem, above reason, not contra rationem, against reason.'*⁶²⁴ *'[...] the ultimate meaning of God's ways is not invalidated because of man's incapacity to comprehend it; nor is our anguish silenced because of the certainty that somewhere in the recesses of God an answer abides.'*⁶²⁵ Incomprehensibility is not the same as senselessness.⁶²⁶

There are sufferings which are inevitable consequences of our actions against the evil in the world. The sense of these actions gives strength to cope with such suffering. However, there are situations when there is no such immediate sense present. Even in these cases, the sufferer himself may see or find a sense or value which overcomes the meaninglessness of suffering itself. The suffering remains suffering, but its destructive power can be overcome. Experienced suffering may expose evil and lead the sufferer to fight against it. At the same time, exposing evil is not enough, but there should be strength and will to confront it. Job uses his suffering to grow in understanding and at the same time he argues that the aim of his suffering cannot be any educational purpose.⁶²⁷ The values or the sense are not given in the suffering itself (it can lead to destruction as well as to growth in wisdom and belief). What matters is the way of coping with affliction. Elie Wiesel commented on the life of Isaac: *'Isaac will become the defender of his people. Why he? Because he suffered, but that is not a reason good enough. We believe that suffering confers no privileges; it is what you do with your suffering that counts. And Isaac transformed his suffering into praise for man and praise of man, rather than*

⁶²⁰ P. RICOEUR (Ibid.), p. 360.

⁶²¹ M. BUBER: *Replies to my critics*, quoted by O. LEAMAN, p. 182.

⁶²² A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 301.

⁶²³ D. BONHOEFFER. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 139.

⁶²⁴ A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 288.

⁶²⁵ A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 293.

⁶²⁶ SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 41.

⁶²⁷ O. LEAMAN: *Hiob und das Leid: Ursprung des Bösen, Leiden Gottes und Überwindung des Bösen im talmudischen und kabbalistischen Judentum*, in: P. KOSLOWSKI (Hrsg.): *Ursprung und Überwindung des Bösen und des Leidens in den Weltreligionen*, p. 128.

into hate and bitterness.⁶²⁸ It is the wonder of mercy that suffering may be transformed into prayer and love.⁶²⁹

In Judaism or Christianity the sufferings can be understood as participation in the sufferings of the compassionate God. We may speak about a two-way participation in suffering: about God's compassion with the sufferer and about man's compassion with the compassionate God.⁶³⁰ God's Shekhina suffers with His people. The Holy Spirit groans with the creation, waiting for the final salvation. Jesus took the sins of the world upon himself to take them away. Jürgen Moltmann writes: 'God accepts our human guilt as his own suffering and »bears« its burden in our place, so that we can breathe again. »You who bear the suffering of the world«, this applies to the victims. »You who bear the sins of the world«, this applies to the perpetrators. This is the twofold suffering of God.'⁶³¹ God embraces and at the same time transcends suffering.

Suffering *in itself* does not have redeeming sense. It is the acceptance of suffering without passing it on in the unbroken attitude of love that breaks the chain of evil. The compassion and sufferings of Jesus Christ are part of his life lived and given for the healing and salvation of the world. According to the Christian belief and a Jewish understanding,⁶³² the end-time of salvation comes through these inevitable sufferings, which arise in the confrontation with the sinfulness and evil of the world. The sufferings are participation in the suffering of the Messiah and in the end-time afflictions – with the hope of final salvation.

Beyond passive endurance, the inevitable sufferings can be actively accepted in the hope that God keeps and lifts us up even there, where we are at the end of our possibilities. This hope in God may give strength not to be broken by suffering, but rather to transform it and grow by it, or to carry on. Even in such acceptance, the cry to God for salvation remains. There exists still a barbaric excess of

⁶²⁸ Quoted in *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 210. Cf. *It all depends on what one makes of that suffering. Isaac knew how to transform it into prayer and love rather than into rancor and malediction.* E. WIESEL: *Messengers of God*, New York 1976, p. 96f, mentioned in *Theodizee in den Weltreligionen*, p. 197; quotation from https://books.google.cz/books?id=Xcgn-d2TkpAC&source=gbs_navlinks_s

⁶²⁹ Cf. SCH. BEN-CHORIN, p. 55; Cf. Suffering as a task, proactive acceptance of necessary sufferings in inner freedom, transcendence of suffering: VIKTOR E. FRANKL: *Homo patiens (A szenvedő ember)*

⁶³⁰ Cf. ZENGER, p. 52.

⁶³¹ The whole quotation: *„Gott nimmt unsere Schuld menschliche Schuld als sein eigenes Leid an und »trägt« ihre Last an unserer Stelle, damit wir wieder atmen können. »Der du trägst das Leid der Welt,« das gilt für die Opfer. »Der du trägst die Sünd' der Welt«, das gilt für die Täter. Das ist das zweifache Leiden Gottes.[...] Versöhnung heißt Freisprechen von der Last der Schuld und Wiedergeburt zu einem anderen Leben, damit Neues werden kann. Wenn nach den biblischen Traditionen Gott Schuld »vergibt,« dann nimmt er mitten in der Geschichte jene neue Schöpfung vorweg, inder man dieser blutgetränkten Erde »nicht mehr gedenken noch sie zu Herzen nehmen muß« (Jes 65,17; Offb 21,1). Nur wenn das Vergeben von Schuld zum Gedenken führt, kann sie auch einmal zum »nicht mehr gedenken müssen« führen. Das hat mit Vergessen und Verdrängen nichts zu tun.»* MOLTSMANN, in: *Als Gott weinte*, p. 57-58; Cf. J. B. BRANTSHCEN, p. 54.

⁶³² Cf. also a Shia Islamic piety - Husain and Mahdi p. 15. The community of believers may share in the sufferings of Hussain, the imams and the Holy Family. Hussain and Mahdi come back at the end of the times, and there is a period of disintegration which precedes the final restoration. (M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 210-212, 217) According to an understanding: *'Husayn dies in protest against the hunger of the hungry, the poverty of the poor and the oppression of the oppressed.'* In a drama (played in 1970 in Cairo) Husayn says: *'Remember me not through the shedding of the blood of others, but remember me when you seek to save the truth from the claws of falsehood. Remember me as you struggle in order that justice may reign over you...Remember me in your tears...I would be killed whenever men are subjugated or humiliated.'* Quoted in M. AYOUB: *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, p. 233-234.

suffering in the world that leads to destruction.⁶³³ Our cry to God is also a cry for all the sufferers and dead whose voices could have never been heard.

Hope 'in spite of'

*'For in hope we have been saved.'*⁶³⁴

We believe in God *in spite of* evil – writes Ricoeur.⁶³⁵ The belief in the God of life and salvation, that reveals so strongly the scandal of evil, calls for a fight against it and gives hope and strength to endure. It is the hope that at the end of the times God will wipe away all tears which may give courage and patience to do what can be done today.

Job came to love God *'for naught'*, thereby making Satan to lose his bet.⁶³⁶ Attar's fools loved God *'for nought'*, without even any apparent hope of salvation. Their fight with God is however – in my opinion – a sign of a very discrete hope. The belief in the God of mercy is not fully given up in Attar's *Book of Suffering*. The belief in the saving God who showed His mercy and salvation in the Jewish history and in Jesus Christ, gives a ground for hope in spite of the absurdity and despair. I'm quoting the words of Heschel: *'And yet God does not need those who praise Him when in a state of euphoria. He needs those who are in love with Him when in distress, both He and ourselves. This is the task: in the darkest night to be certain of the dawn, certain of the power to turn a curse into blessing, agony into song.[...] to go through Hell and to continue to trust in the goodness of God - this the challenge and the way.'*⁶³⁷

About the Hasidim it was known that they managed to sing even when they were bedridden. Singing and praise mean the uplifting of existence.⁶³⁸ As well as joy: *'real joy has in itself the strength to transcend. This is what in the Old Testament is meant by the praise of God.'*⁶³⁹ At the same time, joy and praise arise from the gratitude and realisation of the worth and beauty of life, and they are protests against the forces of destruction. *'Hopelessness cannot be denied, it is too strong. But in spite of hopelessness, or even in hopelessness there is a place or a kind of place where it is possible and it is needed to rejoice. It is possible, because it is needed! This is Hasidic joy'* (E. Wiesel).⁶⁴⁰

⁶³³ Cf. B. BRANTSCHEN, p. 39-41.

⁶³⁴ PAUL THE APOSTLE. Romans 8: 24. *'We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?'* (Rom 8:22-14)

⁶³⁵ P. RICOEUR: *Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, p. 360.

⁶³⁶ P. RICOEUR (Ibid.), p. 361.

⁶³⁷ A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 301; Belief itself is a kind of protest. Cf. *'And these are my last words to You, my wrathful God: Nothing will avail You in the least! You have done everything to make renounce You, to make me lose faith in You, but I die exactly as I have lived, in unshakable belief in You.'* (Kolitz: *Jossel Rakovers Wendung zu Gott*) quoted in: KERMANI: *Das Schrecken Gottes*, p. 271. (*The Terror of God*, p. 212)

⁶³⁸ Cf. A. J. HESCHEL: *A Passion for Truth*, p. 284.

⁶³⁹ *'die echte Freude hat in sich die Kraft des Transzendierens. Das ist im Alten Testament mit Gotteslob gemeint [...]'* C. WESTERMANN: *Leben und Tod*, 1984, s. 153; quoted by WAGENSOMMER, p. 25.

⁶⁴⁰ *'Beznaděj nelze popřít, je příliš silná. Ale navzdory beznaději, dokonce i uvnitř beznaděje je místo, jakýsi druh prostoru, kde je možno a kde je třeba se radovat. Je to možné, protože je to třeba! To je chasidská radost.'* Elie Wiesel. *Zlo a exil*, p. 97.

Jesus' crown of thorn became the crown of the Kingdom of God. The resurrected Son of God still has the wounds, reminding God and us of the still unfinished history of suffering.⁶⁴¹ However, these wounds do not have to lead into nothingness any more.

May the light of Easter shine through the fallen tears.

*'In the Midrash there is a story that God sheds two tears when a person dies. They fall in the ocean and make a sound that can be heard from one end of the horizon to the other. And in Auschwitz? Where was God in Auschwitz? Were we unable to hear God's tears because we ourselves have not wept enough?'*⁶⁴²

'...with the passing years, I have come to understand the twofold questioning that modern man has to undergo: just as I have the right to ask the Judge of all men and women, »Why did you allow Auschwitz to happen?« He also has the right to ask us, »Why did you spoil my creation? What right had you to cut the trees of life to make of them an altar to the glory of death?«

*Suddenly you think of God in His luminous, heavenly solitude, and you begin to cry. You cry for Him and over Him. You cry so much that He too, according to Talmudic tradition, begins to cry, so that your tears and His meet and join together as only two melancholy solitudes, thirsting for presence, may join together'*⁶⁴³

⁶⁴¹ There is a Jewish tradition according to that the Messiah will read the book of Elijah, the book about the sufferings on the whole world. The Messiah remembers our sufferings – says Elie Wiesel. In: *Elie Wiesel. Zlo a exil*, p. 101; Cf. a build about the Trinity by R. Campin where the Son of God keeps his wound open – Cf. M. L. FRETTLÖH: *Wo war Gott in Buchenwald?*

⁶⁴² E. WIESEL, in: *Trotzdem hoffen*, p. 99, English translation:
https://books.google.cz/books?id=_dIKKEuTOAUC&source=gbs_navlinks_s

⁶⁴³ *Elie Wiesel. Between Memory and Hope*, p. 7.

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