Daniel Castelo. *Theological Theodicy.* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012.

Tragedy is not a good time to be handing out books on theodicy, but there is nonetheless a need for sound, accessible books help people reflect on suffering and God. This small volume (105 pages) fills that need well. Daniel Castelo presents a thoughtful, Christian, ecclesial framework for living and loving in a world of unexplainable suffering. If we ask whether a good, all-powerful God is finally compatible with evil, we must say something about "good" and "all-powerful" when applied to God, and about "evil" when applied to creation. Who is this God that we try to reconcile with the sheer excess of creaturely misery? Can we be trusted to know good and evil when we see it?

Theological Theodicy begins by asking whether theodicy is possible. What both Voltaire and Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov share in their attacks on theodicy is the assumption that by reason and natural moral sense we have what it takes to judge God and the world. Protest atheists assume this vantage point and refuse to indulge a god with such bad behavior. As an alternative, Castelo holds up the church's belief that God is a mystery who cannot be perceived or understood except through revelation. Only through participation in "worship, prayer, silence, and yes, ignorance" (22) can we grasp what goodness, evil, and providence finally mean. What is needed is an "exercise both of speaking and remaining silent, of pursuing truth wherever it is found and humbly claiming ignorance when appropriate" (25).

A theological theodicy begins with doxology, with the worshipful confession that the God of Israel is eternal love, creating freely and giving creation its own measure of freedom within this love. Castelo's best work is in his comparisons between the deist god we often revert to in theodicy and the God of Israel who gratuitously gives life to the cosmos and then appears *up to something* within its history. We are caught up into the middle of God's action as the image bearers of God, and from this middle we are empowered to worship and act in love, if not to understand. Within this middle, the evil of the present world is felt as anti-God and thus anti-human. In this theodicy sin, evil, suffering, and death are bound together (with a brief nod to the devil) as the setting, actions, and consequences of a larger rebellion and of the world in the throes of its created but natural change and development.

But is God really doing something about suffering? It is here that a theological account must say enough but not too much: "The value of the crucifixion is not simply that through such an event Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for us; rather . . . God in the flesh becomes one with us so that the threat to all of existence, namely death, is sustained by God" (84-85). God is overcoming the problem of evil from within. Castelo admits it is beyond our grasp to understand how the cross and resurrection can be a sufficient answer to the sheer excess of human suffering. However, if God is rejected for that, we lose the basis upon which critique, lament, and rebellion depends. *Theological Theodicy* concludes with a thoughtful reflection on the church's work and posture within God's mission to overcome evil.

Two omissions are problematic if this is to be a *theological* account. First, a theodicy that does not include Heaven, other than to criticize the escapism of "otherworldly" concerns, ignores a central theme in how believers have sung and prayed through this veil of tears. Second, the extensive biblical pattern of "natural" disasters told as Messianic birth pangs, the wrath of God, or portents of the Day of the Lord seems shriveled when demythologized to only "the outworking of geological and atmospheric patterns of the earth's development and shaping" (66). Granted, the biblical pattern is easily abused, but naturalizing earthquakes and medicalizing pestilence has not salved our deepest questions.

To fit into the publisher's *Cascade Companion* format, *Theological Theodicy* had to be more suggestive than thorough about the many implications of a theological rather than a philosophical approach to theodicy. A theological account must wade from confession into philosophical questions about the nature of analogy, freedom, causality, and providence. Readers will need to look for that work elsewhere. But in laying out the wide theological terrain of a Christian theodicy, this is a helpful book.

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