Topic: The Origin of Evil

Question:

From where does evil come? If God created everything good, and if God is good, then how did evil come into the world? Since evil does exist, and God doesn’t stop it, does this mean that God is not all-powerful?

Answer:

From Holy Scripture, we learn that evil does not come from God. God is good (Psalm 73:1). God created everything “good,” indeed, “very good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25; 31). He is holy and righteous, and in Him is no sin (Leviticus 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8; Psalm 86:2; 1 Peter 1:16; Deuteronomy 32:4; Psalm 116:5; Daniel 9:14; 1 John 3:5).

Since this is the case, since God is good, then evil did not and can not originate with God. But then, from where did evil come? We know that evil, that is, that which is not good, is in the world. We might also add that evil is that which is not of God. People do evil things and evil is of human nature. But evil did not begin with man. Evil, sin, began with the devil. And through the devil, also known as Satan and Lucifer, evil came into the world.

Evil, sin, transgression of God’s Holy Law (1 John 3:4) came into the world through Adam and Eve’s fall in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Satan had tempted Eve, and Eve and Adam ‘gave in’ to temptation, bringing death to the ‘good’ world which God had created (Romans 5:12). Then was the world no longer ‘good’ as it was before. And neither did man any longer possess the image of God in which he was created. Man lost his righteousness, and now, because of Adam, death comes to us all.

However, though Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and brought death into the world, God sent His Son to bring life into the world (John 3:16; 5:40; 10:10; 20:31). Jesus overcame the temptations of the evil one, the devil, in the wilderness (Matthew 4). Jesus denied the temptations to deny the means of salvation for all people. Jesus denied the temptation to come down from the cross and save Himself (Matthew 27:39-43).

Instead, it was by Him, Jesus, remaining on the cross through which eternal life is won and through which evil is done away, as according to Hebrews 2: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (14-15).
But what about the problem of evil and sin, still, in the world? If God is all-powerful, why then does He not end suffering, trial, tribulation, death, etc? Does this mean that He’s not all-powerful, because these things still go on? Not at all. God permits and allows ‘bad things’ to continue to happen. If He desires, all of it could end. But God is God. It is not for us to judge the “King of kings and the Lord or lords” as to what He does or how He does what He does.

It is as St. Paul says, “How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33). The Lord also says by Isaiah the prophet, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”’ (Isaiah 55:8-9)

God doesn’t answer all the questions we have. But what our Lord does provide is that which is necessary for our salvation. He gives us what to believe, even if we don’t fully understand (John 20:31). So it is with evil in the world. None can say with certainty why God permits this or allows that. But we can say that “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). We can say that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). We can also say that though sin and evil are in the world, Jesus’ death on the cross and His resurrection from the tomb mean that death and sin and evil will not have the last Word on the final day, when the Lord Jesus returns in glory (1 Corinthians 15:55). And even now, though there be tribulation, the Lord Jesus says, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (John 16:33). St. John also writes in his first epistle that “whoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).

The Augsburg Confession

XIX. THE CAUSE OF SIN

It is taught among us that although almighty God has created and still preserves nature, yet sin is caused in all wicked men and despisers of God by the perverted will. This is the will of the devil and of all ungodly men; as soon as God withdraws his support, the will turns away from God to evil. It is as Christ says in John 8:44, “When the devil lies, he speaks according to his own nature.”

---