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EVIL AND HUMAN SUFFERING IN VIEW OF GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION IN THE GREAT CONTROVERSY CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

The reality of evil and human suffering raises fundamental questions about human life and meaning. While God is good and powerful, evil often seems to outweigh good in the world. Good Christians also suffer despite their faithfulness to God. Is God impotent?

When asking whether suffering lies inside or outside God's will, indeed if anything that happens could ever go against God's will, attention directly turns to one divine attribute that everyone thinks about when they suffer—God's power. If God is powerful, why is evil and human suffering happening? Why is God withholding his power?¹

This essay examines the issue of evil and human suffering from the perspective of warfare in order to shed some light on these questions. The warfare model, also known as the “great controversy” or “cosmic conflict” model is taken from the biblical worldview, which has as its basis belief in a triune creator God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and good. However, belief in an all-knowing, all-powerful, and good God leads to questions about the problem of evil and human suffering, which in turn leads to God's solution, the plan of redemption.

The term “great controversy” refers to the conflict between God and Satan. Comparing Old Testament (OT) scriptures such as Ezekiel 28:11-16, Isaiah 14:12-14, and New Testament (NT) scriptures such as Revelation 12:7-10 and other parts of the Apocalypse provides insights into this cosmic battle.² The “plan of redemption” is God's plan for complete

¹ R. Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning: Contemporary Responses to the Problem of Pain* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2014), 43.

² F.B. Holbrook, “Great Controversy,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (ed. R. Dederen; Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 969 (969-1009).

deliverance and restoration through the work of Christ, who delivers humanity from the hostile powers of evil (Eph 1:7; Rom 3:24). The act of redemption deals with the great conflict and provides an apparently reasonable clarification and response to the issue of evil and human suffering.

Thinking Christians and theologians accept the ontological views of language that cause the problem of God and evil. Among these commitments are that God exists in objective reality and is not mainly the construction of human minds. God really is all-powerful and perfectly good. Evil exists, but God's goodness is moral, and we best understand his moral goodness in the familiar human concepts of love and justice.³ By way of counter-arguments, theologians and philosophers, have developed various theories of theodicy. Theodicy refers to a justification of God's goodness and justice in view of the existence of evil and suffering.⁴

Since different theodicies have different strengths, it will be good to first discuss them briefly. The different theories will then be discussed in view of the great controversy towards the end of the essay.

DIFFERENT THEORIES OF THEODICY

The *Classical Theory* claims that God is omnipotent and he can do anything he wills of which he is capable; but he cannot do what is logically impossible. God's goodness and power are logically compatible with evil and suffering. However, even an all-powerful God cannot necessarily remove all suffering from the world because this good and all-powerful deity would bring the greatest state of goodness into the world.⁵ The existence of evil, pain, and suffering caused God to go forth seeking after humanity. He went a long way from being God to becoming man. He welcomed the tax collectors, spoke hope to the prostitutes, and healed the sick. Those who came to him in search of the meaning of life were ushered

³ J.R. Schneider, "Seeing God Where the Wild Things Are: An Essay on the Defeat of Horrendous Evil," in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (ed. P. Inwagen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 227 (226-62).

⁴ J. Bernard and S. Hartmann, "Theodicy," in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion* (5 vols.; ed. K. von Stuckard; Boston: Brill, 2007), 4:1878 (1878-79).

⁵ R.M. Green, "Theodicy," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (15 vols.; ed. M. Eliade; New York: Macmillan, 1987), 14:434 (430-41).

into his goodness. Thus, the existence of evil causes people to seek the goodness of the loving God.

The *Free Will Theory* was developed by Plantinga⁶ in response to Mackie's⁷ argument against free will. This theory maintains that God creates humans and non-humans that are freely capable of doing what is morally right and wrong. As it turns out, the free beings God created have exercised the freedom to do wrong. This became the source of evil and suffering which we see and experience.⁸

The *Soul-making Theory* was developed by John Hick from Irenaean theodicy. The theory holds that human beings were created morally and spiritually immature. Hence God allowed the existence of evil and suffering to bring humans into perfect loving relationship with the Creator.⁹ This idea offers a theodicy in respect to natural evil as well as moral evil. The natural evils are essential to an environment in which morally and spiritually immature beings can grow towards their perfection.¹⁰

The *Communion Theory* holds several related positions. However, the best known one is the idea of God as a compassionate deity who suffers with his creatures and is passionately present in their moments of distress. This position does not explain why God allowed evil and suffering from the beginning, yet it opens doors to question God's goodness and power as it comforts and sustains the believer in the moment of trial. The reality of evil and suffering is not denied; instead it is heightened. What is usually seen as an experience to be avoided is accepted as an experience with God.¹¹

⁶A. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 63. Plantinga contends that Mackie operates with a faulty definition of omnipotence. God's omnipotence means that God can do anything that is logical while his omnipotence will not violate the rules of logic. He cannot make a square into a circle.

⁷J.L Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence, *Mind*, n.s. 64 (1955): 209 (200-12). If the whole creation was created by an all-powerful and good God, why did he not remove the possibility of doing evil and let free beings be completely free in doing all the good things?

⁸Plantinga, 434.

⁹J. Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theology* (ed. S.T. Davis; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 46 (39-52).

¹⁰J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Hounds Mills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 368.

¹¹Green, 434. See also K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 3 (ed. T.F. Torrance and G.W. Bromiley; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 69; and J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 5. Both argue in terms of this theory.

The *Eschatological Theory* is based on the belief that human life exceeds personal death when the righteous receive their full eternal reward and the wicked their appropriate punishment.¹²

The *Great Controversy Theory* holds that human beings are involved in the conflict between superhuman forces of good and evil.¹³ Evil and human suffering originated from Lucifer, God's archenemy (Rev 12:7-9). Humankind's rebellion against God is part of the cosmic conflict. The cosmic conflict is also about God's love and his supremacy as displayed in his creation. The creation is an expression of God's love and his love is the basis of his sovereignty. The great controversy theory also speaks of God's self-sacrificing love as the power that defeats evil and suffering, and that will ultimately rescue and restore humanity in the events of the eschaton. How the warfare originated and humanity got involved are the primary issues that need to be understood.

THE ORIGIN AND CONTEXT OF EVIL AND GREAT CONTROVERSY

Among many theories given as to how evil arose and why God allowed its existence is the suggestion that evil originated with a war in heaven over God's authority. The scripture is clear on the existence of evil and the controversy between good and evil; but the origin of evil seems to be unclear to many. However, Ezekiel 28:1-19 and Isaiah 14: 4-23 in the OT and Revelation 12:7-10 in the NT explain the origin of evil and the cosmic conflict between good and evil.

Most Bible scholars refer to the prophecies of Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 as relating solely to the kings of Babylon and Tyre. However, such an interpretation seems inadequate for two reasons. First, the interpretation overlooks the close connection between the two texts and other scriptures dealing with the satanic world (e.g., Dan 10:13 and Eph 6:12). Second, it fails to take into account that the descriptions exceed the scope of any earthly ruler.¹⁴ The imagery in Ezekiel 28:11-19 exceeds the local reference to the king of Tyre in phrases such as: "You were in Eden the garden of God" (v. 13); "you were anointed as cherub;" "you were on the holy

¹² G.R. Osborne, "Theodicy and Apocalypse," *Trinity Journal* n.s. 14 (1993): 74 (63-77).

¹³ Rice, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning*, 76.

¹⁴ M.F. Unger, "Satan," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (ed. E.F. Harrison, G.W. Bromiley, and C.F.H. Henry; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 972-73.

mountain of God" (v. 14); "you were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you" (v. 15); "so I drove you out in disgrace from the mount of God ... O guardian cherub" (v. 16).¹⁵ This description unveils the activities in the heavenly courts and it seems appropriate to the fall of Lucifer.¹⁶

Ezekiel turns the description of the king of Tyre into a description of Lucifer. Certain characteristics prevent us from applying the latter attributes to the literal king of Tyre. He was not in Eden. He was not the guardian cherub (v. 14). As for Isaiah, he starts with a prophecy against literal Babylon, but shifts into a figurative description of Lucifer, who has fallen from heaven (14:12), and who attempted to raise himself above God (v. 13).¹⁷

The prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah provide the background, showing where and how the controversy started. The conflict began with Lucifer, who envied God's power and sowed dissention among his angelic colleagues. The dissention led to open conflict against God and, as a result, Lucifer and his followers were cast out of heaven (Ezek 28:16; Rev 12:7-9).¹⁸ The scripture seems to be clear on the origin of evil. However, the issues in the controversy need to be identified in order to provide an even clearer view of the cosmic conflict.

1. Issues Involved in the Great Controversy

The issues are not stated directly in the scripture. However, several Bible passages provide hints. First, *God's law* seems to be under attack: Satan, disguised as serpent, challenged Eve to choose independently rather than obey God's law (Gen 3:4). John defines sin as the "breaking of God's law" (1 John 3:4). It is clear from that epistle that it is referring to the moral law. Sin is also viewed as transgressions against God's will (Ps 40:8). The scripture says that "the devil has been sinning from the beginning" (1 John

¹⁵ All biblical citations are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise stated.

¹⁶ L.C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20-40* (WBC 29; Dallas: Word 1990), 95.

¹⁷ G. Christo, "The Battle between God and Satan in the Book of Job," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11 (2000): 285 (282-86).

¹⁸ R. Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1985), 128.

3:8). This implies that Satan questioned the need for angels to be subjected to God's moral commands.

Zechariah shows how angels submit to God's commands in terms of human deliverance from sin. Satan condemned Joshua before God as unworthy of redemption. However, the angel of the Lord objected to Satan's accusation, assuring Joshua that he could be delivered from Satan's condemnation (Zech 3:1-7). Thus, angels are subject to God's moral commands in order to secure humanity's salvation.

Second, *God's love and justice* is questioned. Satan is described as an accuser who accuses people day and night (Rev 12:10). Satan presents Job's obedience as self-serving and asserts that when it becomes clear that obeying God will not benefit him, Job will abandon God (1:6-12). Satan also accuses God for forgiving and accepting Joshua (Zech 3:1-5). The real issue here is God's justice: is God fair when he saves evildoers and declares them righteous? "Lucifer argues that God can show justice only against the violator of the law, it is unjust to show mercy to the violator."¹⁹

Third, there is *humanity's freedom to be independent*. Satan boasted that he wanted to be like God (Isa 14:13-14). Self-became the center of his thought, he thought he was capable of managing his own life apart from God. Satan lured Eve to make her own choice independently from God by saying that she would be like God (Gen 3:1-3).²⁰

Finally, the *relationship between God and humankind* is questioned. God is a relational deity whose purpose for creating free moral beings was to have a free loving relationship with them. He came looking for Adam and Eve when they fell (Gen 3:8). God still called Israel his own people even though they had rebelled against him (Ezek 36:23-27). Hosea dramatized God's desire for human relationship in his marriage relationship with the promiscuous Gomer (Hos 1-3).²¹

Satan constantly seeks to attack on these four fronts in the great controversy and the following are some examples of this in the scripture.

¹⁹ Holbrook, 975.

²⁰ Holbrook, 975.

²¹ N.R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols.; Berrien Spring: Andrews University Press, 2011), 2:285.

2. Biblical Evidences of Great Controversy in the OT

The cosmic conflict biblical framework requires God's revelation in response to Satan's accusation. The serpent in Genesis 3 appears to know the secret of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which God alone knows. The serpent has supernatural knowledge.²² It is not merely a speaking snake, but Satan himself.²³ The serpent's persuasive argument to disobey God's command is a direct hint about Satan's rebellion. Satan introduces the knowledge of breaking God's commands and independence from God to humankind. The curse of enmity between the woman's offspring and the serpent (Gen 3:15) hints of the fall of the ancient serpent from heaven (Rev 12:9). An inference can be drawn that the conflict between God and Satan continues on the earth.²⁴

The context of the book of Exodus is a conflict between two supernatural powers in the courts of Pharaoh (Exod 7:8-13). Ordinary human beings cannot cast their rods down and have them turned into snakes. The fact that the magician's rods becoming serpents shows that Egyptians had contact with some source of supernatural power apart from that of Moses. That the magicians were held in high esteem implies that they must have experienced at some point the actual results of their practice of magic.²⁵ "Serpent," translated from the Hebrew word *tannim*, refers to a more frightening creature than a snake. The symbol of *tannim* indicates chaotic forces which God defeated in the exodus.²⁶ Satan, the author of chaotic powers, was behind Pharaoh trying to obstruct God's plan of redemption. Here is an insight into the cosmic controversy.

The wars of OT times were seen as battles of the gods. God has always been represented by the nation of Israel. The Levites killed 3000 men and women who rebelled against God and worshipped an idol (Exod 32:27-35). Sennacherib mockingly said that God could not deliver the people of Judah from his hand. He asked the people of Judah and their king to stop trusting

²² H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. M.E. Biddle (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), 15.

²³ M.J. Erickson, *Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 158.

²⁴ C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. J.J. Scullion (Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 259.

²⁵ S.H. Horn, "Exodus," in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (ed. F.D. Nichols; Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1978), 1:520-28 (henceforth, *SDABC*).

²⁶ T. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 113.

God and submit to him (2 Kgs 19:1-35). Sennacherib displayed Satan's arrogant attitude in accordance with the pattern of the great controversy.

Daniel also unveils the battles of the earthly powers and kingdoms. A example of such supernatural involvement is found in Daniel 10:13. The angel Gabriel was resisted by the prince of Persia for 21 days. Then Michael, the chief prince, came and released him. In ancient Jewish thought, YHWH was the ruler of Israel, a role given to Michael.²⁷ An angelic being similar in the rank to Gabriel is seen as the patron of the Persian kingdom. Thus, the prince of Persia who resisted Gabriel is not a human prince but the accuser of Michael.²⁸ Here is another indication of comic controversy.

The book of Job also shows the interplay between God and Satan before the universe (1:6). Satan is declared to be the leader of this world (Job 1:7). God points to Job to show Satan that humans on the earth are not completely under his domain. Although Satan inflicts intense pain and suffering using both moral and natural evils, Job was never shaken out of his faith. The fact that Job's test was mentioned in the major meeting between God and Satan may suggest that the universe is involved in the same question. Thus the book of Job again demonstrates the great controversy that has involved human affairs in the cosmic spiritual battle.²⁹

Zechariah shows Satan standing at the right side of Joshua, accusing him as the violator of God's law. God rebukes Satan and restores Joshua (Zech 3:1-8). The heart of the issue is not Joshua but God's love and mercy extended to fallen humanity. Satan accuses God of being unfair to accept Joshua, who has violated God's law, one of the issues in the cosmic conflict.³⁰ This is another example of the cosmic controversy being portrayed.

Since the battles of the OT, which were regarded as the battles of the gods, the belief in supernatural powers waging battles provides a background for ancient people to interpret the occurrence of both moral and

²⁷ R. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Biblical Themes of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007), 24.

²⁸ D. Stuart, "Michael," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (4 vols.; ed. G.W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3:347 (347-48).

²⁹ Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 1:433.

³⁰ R.L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (WBC 32; Dallas: Word, 1984), 199.

natural evils and human sufferings. The NT appears to shed more light on the cosmic conflict as it is the fulfilment of the OT.

3. Biblical Evidences of Great Controversy in the NT

There are four distinct elements of great controversy scenarios in the four gospels. First, at the birth of Jesus King Herod searched the entire town of Bethlehem and its vicinity and killed every male child aged two and below (Matt 2:7-17). He did this intending to destroy the Christ; but he was unsuccessful because the angel warned Joseph who took the child and his mother and fled to Egypt (vv. 13-14). This is a demonstration of the devil using the civic authority of the day to destroy the promised offspring of the woman (Gen 3:15).

Second, the temptation of Jesus Christ in Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13 portrays another view of the great controversy. Satan said, “If you are the Son of God, order these stones to become bread (Matt 4:3).” Satan tempted Jesus to use his power for self-satisfaction, which is against God’s nature.³¹ Then the adversary showed him all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, “All these I will give you if you will bow down and worship me” (v. 9). This implies breaking of God’s law that states, “you shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20: 3). Finally, the tempter said, “If you are the son of God, throw yourself down.” This is misusing God’s name and misapplying his promise (Exod 20:7), which is breaking of God’s law. The issues in the great controversy are once again in view.

Third, with respect to Christ’s authority and the law, the gospel of Luke portrays two important features in regards to Christ’s conflicts. The first conflict deals with his authority to forgive sin. The Pharisees questioned Jesus as to what authority he had to forgive the sins of people. They accused him of blasphemy, saying that only God can forgive sin (5:17-26). This shows lack of belief and, even more, God’s love and justice is questioned by implication. The second has to do with the issue of the Mosaic Law and the traditions that Jesus disregarded. The religious leaders accused Jesus for eating with tax collectors and healing on the Sabbath

³¹ D.H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville: New Testament Publications, 1992), 22

(5:27-6:10). In both instances God's love and justice were attacked under the guise of law-breaking.³² Here is another hint of the great controversy.

Finally, as regards God's love and justice, the gospel of John portrays God as the giver. He sends Jesus on a mission of deliverance to lost people (3:16; 10:10). Jesus came to the world with no helpers and many opponents such as the Pharisees (5:18; 7:1; 10:31), Judas (12:4-6; 13:27-30), the powers of darkness (1:5; 16:33), and the Roman authorities (18:3; 19:1-3). The Jewish leaders realised that Jesus was speaking with authority, so they question his authority over the law of Moses. They claimed to be God's people and accused Jesus of being possessed by a demon (8:48-54).

Jesus, knowing who was attacking him from behind the leaders spoke directly to them. "You belong to your father the devil and you want to carry out your father's desire" (John 8:44a). God sent Jesus to deliver humankind, while Satan worked through the Jews to attack God's plan. Judas also became the accuser's helper to try to destroy the divine plan.³³ Again God's love was under attack, another example of the great conflict in action.

Christ's death on the cross is the climax of the four gospels and it is where the devil's hidden dealings were revealed. The death of Christ affirms that Satan is the accuser and the instigator of all kinds of evil. This is seen in the attitude of the Jewish religious leaders, who knew the prophecy of the coming Messiah, but were unwilling to accept or submit to him. Satan involves humans who choose to ignore the principles of life: "Love the Lord your God with all your hearts and with all your souls and with all your minds ... and love your neighbours as yourselves" (Matt 22:37-38). People who ignore this blueprint for life become the agents of Satan in inflicting pain and suffering upon their fellow human beings.

Having seen the evidences of great controversy in both the OT and NT, it becomes apparent that God is not indifferent to or unaffected by human suffering. As seen in the OT, God revealed himself to his prophets and people. The incarnation of Christ in the NT implies that God can limit

³² J.D. Kingsbury, "The Plot of Luke's Story of Jesus," *Interpretation* 4 (1994): 374 (369-78).

³³ M.W.G Stibbe, *John as the Story Teller: Narration Criticism and the Four Gospels* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 123-24.

himself to our human context.³⁴ However, Satan has a number of weapons that a God of love cannot use and this explains why there is so much terrible evil in the world. These Satanic weapons prevent God from simply controlling evil and make it necessary for God to war against it.³⁵ The solution to this great struggle lies in God's plan of redemption.

4. God's Sovereignty in the Plan of Redemption

The scripture contains numerous occasions when Satan tried to destroy God's plan of redemption, and he has had successes along the way. We should not expect God to exercise absolute divine authority in the controversy. Just as God's power did not stop the controversy from originating in heaven and later affecting the earth, he continues to allow humans freedom in post-fall history.

God warned Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:16-17), but he did not prevent them from doing so (Gen 3:1-6). After they fell (Gen 3:1-6), God promised that through the incarnated Son he would crush Satan's head while Satan would strike his heel (Gen 3:15). Rhetorically, crushing of the head is worse than the striking of the heel. The crushing of the head on the cross implies an ultimate defeat from which there is no recovery and it is also an eternal reminder of that great victory.³⁶ In using the metaphor of crushing the head, Genesis provides an affirmation statement of God's plan to deliver and to restore humanity.

Christ lineage would be through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Satan, therefore, did everything he could to ruin this lineage. God's foreknowledge did not stop Abraham from exercising his free choice to have Ishmael (Gen 16:1, 5, 11).³⁷ Although God chose Abraham's descendants, they were not free from Satan's attack. Satan continued to cause problems for the people of Israel, the lineage of the Messiah.³⁸ God

³⁴ Gully, *Systematic Theology*, 2:289.

³⁵ G. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil; Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downer Grove: InterVarsity, 2009) 192.

³⁶ Horn, "Genesis," in *SDABC*, 1:232-33.

³⁷ Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:305

³⁸ J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. J. King (Edinburgh: Calvin's Press, 1923), 414.

told Abraham that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land and would be mistreated. But the Lord promised to deliver them while punishing the nation that enslaved them (Gen 15:13-14).

God is all-knowing (Josh 22:22) and the God of all knowledge (1 Sam 2:3). He foreordained certain activities in his foreknowledge. In his foreknowledge he understands the logical sequence and relation among various events. This means that God foreordains things simultaneously in a logical order. But this logical order can be manipulated by humanity's consistent disobedience. However, God always responds to rebellious acts in a redemptive manner, as seen in his consistent responses to the rebellious acts of the Israelites. God always knew that Christ would be born and would die. He understood this concept logically as well as chronologically.³⁹ Hence, God told Abraham what would happen to his children; but he never foreordained Satan's cunning activities. It was Satan's choice to enslave and attempt to destroy the Saviour's lineage in Egypt.

Pharaoh took pride in his own strength which made him unwilling to submit to powers higher than himself. His pride, derived from his earthly power, made him feel equal to God.⁴⁰ This is the exact picture the prophet Isaiah painted of Satan (14:13-14; cf. Ezek 28:2b). Satan wanted to keep the Israelites out of the promised land by using Pharaoh. This was an attempt to make the promise of the Messiah of no effect. Pharaoh became an instrument in the hands of Satan (Ezek 29:3).⁴¹

The journey of the Israelites portrays God's achievement in leading a group of people from Egypt to the promised land. It tells the story of their alienation from God. Before the events of Sinai there are four stories with a component of estrangement: the deliverance at the Red Sea (Exod 14:11-12); the bitter water at Marah (Exod 15:24); the gift of manna (Exod 16:4); and the water from the rock at Meriba (Exod 17:2-3). In each of these stories Israel's survival is at stake; but God responds graciously to their doubts and fears and supplies their needs. The estrangements after Sinai

³⁹ J. Feinberg, "God knows all Things," in *Predestination and Free Will* (ed. D. and R. Basinger; Downer Grove: InterVarsity, 1986), 36 (19-43).

⁴⁰ W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 403. Note also Exod 5:2.

⁴¹ Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:306.

were of a different order and the people were punished. The events recorded in Numbers 25:1-5 are the climax of the apostasy and rebelliousness which happened during Israel's journey.⁴² These events can be set out as follows.

- Apostasy – the golden calf (Exod 32)
- Discontent – the quail at Taberah (Num 11)
- Rebelliousness – Israel at Kadesh and Hormah (Num 14)
- Discontent – snakes (Num 21)
- Apostasy – Shittim (Num 25:1-9)⁴³

In the climactic story the Israelites were unwilling to comprehend God's struggle to ensure their future against the threat from the Moabite king. In contrast to his devotion, Israel showed shallow commitment and lack of confidence in the providence of God.⁴⁴ Their sins were the controlling factor in the journey to the promised land. Following the pattern in the great controversy, Satan seemed to be attacking God's plan of redemption by causing Israelites to rebel against God by involving them in sexual immorality just before they reached the promised land (Num 15:1-9).

The same pattern appears in the story of David. Satan knew God had promised David that his kingdom would be forever (1 Sam 7:8-16). Satan targeted David as a means of defeating God's plan by causing Saul to be jealous of David (1 Sam 19:10-11, 23:7-28). God withdrew his spirit from Saul causing him to become mentally unstable. Abnormal psychological conditions were believed to be due to the influence of spirits. The spirit that entered into Saul was not subject to the will of God. Saul's experience resonates with the description of the empty house in Luke 11:24-26: when God's spirit withdrew, another spirit moved in. Saul was controlled by the evil spirit and began to attack David.⁴⁵ Here is yet another indication of Satan attempting to spoil God's plan of redemption.

⁴² P.J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC 5; Waco: Word, 1984), 281.

⁴³ Budd, 281.

⁴⁴ D.T. Olson, *Numbers* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 152.

⁴⁵ G.B. Caird and J.C. Schroeder, "1 Samuel," in *The Interpreters Bible* (12 vols.; ed G.A. Buttrick et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1953-56), 2:853-1040.

A further example is seen in the attitude of Sennacherib, king of Assyria. He boasted before the nation of Judah that their God could not deliver them from his hands. He told the people to turn from God and Hezekiah's admonition to trust in God (2 Kgs 18: 28-30, 19: 9-10). Satan is known in the scripture as a murderer and the father of lies (John 8:44). Sennacherib displayed Satan's attitude as he planned to destroy Judah by claiming God was a deceiver. God intervened on behalf of Israel and destroyed Sennacherib's army (2 Kgs 19:35).

The same outline appears in the story of Esther, even though the names of God and Satan are never mentioned. Satan planned to destroy all the Jews through the decree initiated by Haman, and authorized by King Xerxes of Persia (Esth 3:13). Haman claimed divine honors for himself, he became a Jew-hater, and wished to destroy all the Jews. It was not merely a personal dispute between Mordecai and Haman that is related in the book of Esther and remembered on Purim, but a conflict threatening national existence and the lineage of the Messiah.⁴⁶ Purim remembers the victory gained by the Jews over their enemies, and the deliverance effected by God on their behalf.⁴⁷ It recalls the source of the victory and the protection gained over the Israel's enemies.⁴⁸ Purim celebrates God's intervention in delivering his people and triumphing over the adversary (8:8-17).

The same pattern is seen in the NT. King Herod ordered all the male infants in Bethlehem to be killed, in order to murder Jesus, but God showed the plan to Joseph in a dream and the family escaped to Egypt (Matt 2:13-18). The slaughter of infants by Herod was another chapter in Israel's whole experience, summed up in Jesus, the promised Messiah.⁴⁹

The story of Jesus Christ is also summed up in the history of Israel in Egypt and the Exodus. Jesus was always the Saviour of Israel, participating both in their victories and their agonies. Satan had always sought to threaten the purpose of God throughout Israel's history.⁵⁰ His defeat in

⁴⁶ B.W. Anderson and A.C Lichtenberger, "Esther," in *The Interpreters Bible*, 3:847-48.

⁴⁷ L. Jacobs, "Purim," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (16 vols.; ed. C. Roth and G. Wigoder; Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 13:1390-95.

⁴⁸ B.C. Gregory, "Purim," in *Dictionary of the Wisdom, Poetry and Writings* (ed. T. Longman III and P. Enns; Nottingham: InterVarsity, 2008), 631-634.

⁴⁹ W.F. Albright and C.S Mann, *Matthew* (Anchor Bible 26; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 19.

⁵⁰ D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word, 1993), 36.

Christ's incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection saw Satan casted out of heaven (Rev 12:13; Luke 10:18; John 12:31) Christ came so that he would destroy the works of Satan (Matt 12:28-19; Acts 10:38; 2 Tim 1:10), and Satan rebels against God's redemptive work.⁵¹

This overview of God's plan of redemption and the way God exercised his power in the cosmic conflict provides a way of looking at human history with regard to the issue of evil. The scripture records God's judgements on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24-29), the global flood (Gen 7), the miraculous crossing of the Jordan, and the destruction of Jericho (Josh 3-4). All of these are examples of God's power in judging evil while delivering the obedient. One thing that stands out clearly in these acts is humanity's freedom of choice. Evidently, free will is not a hindrance to God's exercise of absolute sovereign power.⁵² This gives a balanced view of how God responds to the issue of evil and human suffering.

EVALUATING THE MAIN THEORIES IN THEODICY WITH A VIEW TO THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

Many theories have been developed as a response to the problem of evil and human suffering. This section investigates only five theories in view of the great controversy framework to evaluate whether or not the theories are biblically sound.

1. Great Controversy and Classical Theory

The classical theory is a rational attempt to reconcile the existence of evil in the world with the doctrines of divine omnipotence, and God's all-knowing and goodness. David Griffin offers the usual four step problem statement. (1) If God is all-powerful, he could prevent all evil. (2) If God is good, he would want to prevent all evil. (3) Evil exists. (4) Therefore, God is either not all-powerful or all-good or both.⁵³ The common conclusion theists assume with this model is that God allows evil to exist in order to bring

⁵¹ A.F. Johnson, "Heb-Rev," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary with New International Version* (12 vols.; ed. F. Gabelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:515-16.

⁵² Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:307.

⁵³ D.R Griffin, "Creation Out of Nothing, Creation out of Chaos, and the Problem of Evil," in Davis, *Encountering Evil*, 108 (108-25).

about greater good in humans. Consequently, this theory is also referred to as greater good theodicy.⁵⁴

The problem with this theory is not that God and evil are logically incompatible, but rather that the compatibility of God and the apparent pointlessness of much evil is questionable. This challenge has forced theists to hold that an all-powerful, all-knowing, and good God would not allow pointless evil; yet gratuitous evil does seem to exist. The burden of generating a positive theodicy is on the theist, and that burden has been largely neglected in theological circles.⁵⁵ For a theist to develop a positive theodicy, it has to be scripturally-based. As noted in this thesis, the great controversy theory appears to be the only biblical model that provides insights into the origin of evil and human suffering.

Problem 1: “If God is all-powerful, he could prevent all evil.” The great controversy concept shows that the Bible teaches God’s supremacy over the earth, and it also teaches that God does not control the behaviour of free agents, whether humans or angels. Evil is the choice of a created non-human being, Satan. God cannot manipulate his agent’s free choice if that agent is to remain free. Rice comments that what was at stake in the cosmic battle was God’s reputation. Because Satan resented God’s authority, he accused God of being a tyrant over his created beings, depriving them of their dignity (Ezek 28:16).⁵⁶ Satan’s false accusation against God instigates the conflict.

The scriptures indicate that God does not use force, instead he demonstrates self-sacrificing love toward humanity (John 3:16; Phil 2:6-11). God’s love reflects his sovereignty which he wanted to show through Jesus Christ. Christ’s self-sacrificing love exposes evil for what it is before humanity.⁵⁷ The plan of redemption is a demonstration of God’s authority over evil. Each time God manifests and fulfils his plan of redemption, Satan is unmasked and his evil works are brought more under control. Thus, God’s love is more than just incompatible with evil, the scripture

⁵⁴ C.S Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 27-28. See also J.S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil* (rev. and exp. ed.; Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 176.

⁵⁵ M.L. Peterson, “Christian Theism and the Problem of Evil,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (1978): 45 (35-46).

⁵⁶ Rice, *The Reign of God*, 129.

⁵⁷ Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:293; see also Boyd, 156-57.

affirms that “where sin increased, grace increased all the more” (Rom 5:21).

Problem 2: “If God is good, he would want to prevent all evil.” The great controversy concept holds that God’s goodness to his created beings is manifested by honouring human choices. When Moses asked God to show him his glory, God cause all his goodness to pass before Moses (Exod 33:18-19). Then the Lord came down and proclaimed his name in front of Moses saying, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving their wickedness, rebellion and sin” (Exod 34:5-7). The very nature of God’s good acts was revealed to Moses. God’s goodness proved to Moses that God would be gracious to the Israelites, despite their rebelliousness and evil deeds.⁵⁸ This was a statement of God’s sovereignty, along with his favour and compassion. It was God’s goodness that allows the existence of evil;⁵⁹ yet his goodness will not let the guilty and evil go unpunished (Exod 34:7). God deals with evil in ways that demonstrate the real nature of his benevolence.

Problem 3: “Evil exists” and, “thus, God is either not all-powerful or not all-good or both.” This too can also be evaluated in the light of the great controversy. Given the preceding paragraphs, evil exists because of a good God whose supremacy is based on love. It is not evil which causes God to bring about good, but rather evil has distorted perceptions of God’s goodness and love.⁶⁰

The weakness in the classical theory is that it never identifies the cause of the problem of evil and suffering and who started the problem. The theory only reconciles the existence of evil with God’s attributes. There is a possibility of concluding that God is probably the cause of the issue. However, in view of the great controversy theory, this is not true. The great controversy theory spells out clearly how the issue of evil and suffering originated, and how God is responding to the issue in the light of the scripture.

In the great controversy theory God has to bring to light the distortion caused by Satan in the cosmic battle. He wrestles against the adversary by

⁵⁸ Fretheim, 299.

⁵⁹ J. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1987), 299.

⁶⁰ Durham, 298.

extending his power of forgiveness and compassion to rebellious humanity while unveiling the true nature of Satan. The scripture exposes Satan as a liar, deceiver, and slanderer of God (John 8:44). By contrast, God is seen as consistent in all of his attributes.⁶¹ Great controversy theory demonstrates that God deals with evil and suffering in ways that illuminate the real nature of his authority and goodness. The problem with classical theory is that not all evil brings about the greatest state of goodness.

Every intelligent being in God's created universe is subject to his authority while retaining their freedom. Yet Holbrook affirms that absolute freedom does not exist in natural order or human society. The issue is not about escaping from authority, instead it is about identifying under which authority life will be made the most meaningful now and eternally.⁶² God's authority allowed humankind and the angelic hosts to enjoy the freedom they have. However, Lucifer in his free will developed the spirit of envy over God's authority (Ezek 28:15-16). This leads to the next theory which is the free will theory.

2. Great Controversy and Free Will Theory

The free will theory builds on the idea that evil resulted from the creatures' exercise of free will. The fault, then, lies with God's created beings and not with the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator. The great controversy also accepts the fact that God created both the angels and humankind as free moral beings. The scripture is clear on the role of free will in the origin of evil. Lucifer was blameless from the day God created him till wickedness was found in him (Ezek 28:15). God is the creator of perfect and righteous beings. However, evil emerged from one such perfect created being's free will. Mackie argues that if an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good God created the earth containing free creatures, he should include beings that would always choose to do right.⁶³ But if God had done that, then free will would no longer be free will, and God would still control the choices of his created beings.

Given that God's unconditional love is the basis of his omnipotence, and that he created both non-human and human beings out of his love, it makes

⁶¹ Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:293.

⁶² Holbrook, 976.

⁶³ Mackie, 208.

sense that God would respect the free choice of his created beings. Free beings which are programmed by God to always do what is right implies that the free beings are not significantly free; they are not doing what is right freely.⁶⁴ The idea of God's sovereignty and moral freedom is demonstrated in the instruction given to Adam not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17).

The instruction given shows that humanity and the creation are subject to God's authority; yet the choice of whether to obey or not was theirs. Gully notes that God's sovereignty never stopped Eve and Adam from eating the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6).⁶⁵ The obvious reason is that God respected their free will choice.

Lucifer's case is quite different in the sense that he envied God's authority and wanted to be like God (Isa 14:12-14). By being observant and comparing himself with the rest of the angels, Lucifer became proud and thought God was not fair in his authority over the created beings. Lucifer claimed that the free will given by God was inadequate for the created beings (Ezek 28:17-18). Rice suggests that Lucifer accused God of being a tyrant.⁶⁶ Such an accusation would undermine God's sovereignty. Boyd contends that nothing is essentially praiseworthy in sheer power. What is commendable about God's power is not the exercise of the authority he has, but that because of his character he does not exercise all the power he could.⁶⁷ His love surpasses his sovereignty. Lewis adds that the greatest miracle of divine omnipotence and the greatest testimony of God's sovereignty was the fact that he created beings who possess the power to say no to him.⁶⁸

Although Satan protested that free will was inadequate; he used his own free will to hurl his accusations against God. Satan's selfishness murdered Christ, while Christ's selfless love redeemed humanity. Calvary is fully compatible with what God has done, is doing, and will do to end evil and

⁶⁴ Plantinga, 30.

⁶⁵ Gully, *Systematic Theology*, 2:306.

⁶⁶ Rice, *The Reign of God*, 129.

⁶⁷ Boyd, 148.

⁶⁸ Lewis, 127.

suffering through his plan of redemption.⁶⁹ God's authority reflects his love and humanity's free choice to choose to believe in him (John 3:16).

The weakness and the long standing challenge to the free will theory is that it does not offer answers to natural evil. Natural evil occurs causing human beings suffering and pain outside of their free will choices. Is there any force or being behind such natural evil causing many problems to human beings against their will? Moreover, how can one explain the fact that sin entered the creation when everything was perfect and morally good?

The great controversy model affirms that Lucifer was ordained as a guardian cherub at God's throne. God gave him ability to be a commanding angel (Ezek 28:14). God never controlled the authority given to Lucifer, which implies that he had the freedom to demonstrate his given authority either for or against God. As it turned out, Lucifer used his God-given abilities and freedom to rebel against God which started the cosmic rebellion between good and evil (Rev 12:7-9) from which springs great controversy theory. Further, there is no indication in the scripture of God withdrawing the gift from Satan. Satan can do anything within his supernatural abilities as he did in the presence of God. He caused fire to fall from the sky and burned up all Job's sheep and servants, which the surviving servant interpreted as the fire from God (Job 1:16). He caused a tornado from the desert that destroyed all Job's children (1:18). It is clear from Job's experience that Satan can and is able to cause natural disaster to inflict pain and suffering.

Satan also afflicted Job with painful sores all over his body (Job 2: 7). This proves that Satan is able to inflict disease upon humankind. He can multiply germs and viruses that can lead to much pain and suffering. Although the Bible does not use the scientific language of causation (e.g., germs and viruses), such agents of causation are not incompatible with belief in Satan. They can be conceptualized as tools he uses.

The free will theory is open to several objections, one of which is how can one explain the fact that sin entered the creation when everything was perfect and morally good? The great controversy theory answers this question by locating the origin of sin in Lucifer's mind (Ezek 28:15). In comparing himself with other the angels he thought that he was more like

⁶⁹ Gully, *Systematic Theology*, 2:292-93.

God and so could become a god (Isa 14:13,14). Even though it is not mentioned in the scripture, the loving creator God must have talked to Lucifer in an effort to change his mind. Using his free will, Lucifer chose to disobey God. That is when evil entered into God's perfect creation through the exercise of free will to disobey God's instruction (1 John 3:4)

3. Great Controversy and Soul-making Theory

Soul-making theory teaches that God created spiritually immature human beings who were morally neutral and capable of choosing either good or evil.⁷⁰ Further, because God created humanity spiritually immature, he has allowed the existence of evil for the purpose of soul-making.⁷¹ People only grow and develop through the exercise of freedom in a spiritually ambiguous world.⁷² Humans are free beings, free to bring evil and suffering upon both themselves and others. This implies that the natural environment contains natural evils as one element which contributes to soul development.⁷³ The divine intention for humanity was to develop perfect finite beings in loving relationship with their Creator. Hence, God allowed both the natural and human evil to exist.

The idea that natural evil plays a part in soul development makes sense. However, the creation of humanity as spiritually immature raises a question about the biblical description of the creation of human beings. God said, "Let us make man in our image in our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Cairus remarks that the physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual endowments, as well as the ability to commune with God are integral to God's image.⁷⁴ The image has a capacity to relate to God. This means that God can enter into personal relationship with humankind and make a covenant with them.⁷⁵ Human function in its sphere has to be commensurate with God in his sphere because human beings are God's agents (Gen 2:4-6, 15) and substitutes (Ps

⁷⁰ S.T. Davis, "Free Will and Evil," in id., *Encountering Evil*, 72 (69-83).

⁷¹ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 69.

⁷² Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," 46.

⁷³ Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 323, 327.

⁷⁴ A.E. Cairus, "The Doctrine of Man," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 208 (205-33).

⁷⁵ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 1 (ed. T.F. Torrance and G.W. Bromiley; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 183-84.

8:3-8; 115:16). They did not merely turn out in the image of God, but were carefully designed to be such.⁷⁶

The “image” portrays the product of the creation rather than the process. The formation of human beings was the final product of creation.⁷⁷ It was after the creation of human beings that the approval formula changed from being “good” to “very good” (Gen 1:31; cf. 1:4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25). Everything was “good” in accordance with its kind, with the emphasis “very” at the end of the creation of humans implying that the existence of evil in the creation of God is absolutely denied and excluded.⁷⁸

Human beings created in God’s image points to their role as God’s representatives over the lower creation (Gen 1:26b; Ps 8:6-8). They were created to glorify God, and to represent his goodness, wisdom, and power (Ps 19:1-4; 100:1-4). God’s glory cannot be represented by morally and spiritually immature beings.⁷⁹ The scripture provides clear evidence that God created fully mature human beings both morally and spiritually.

The great controversy theory demonstrates that God has set a high standard in the creation of humans (Gen 1:31). At the fall, Adam and Eve dropped below the benchmark God had set. Their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked (Gen 3:7), a sign of emptiness when they had previously been filled with God’s glory. They covered themselves with fig leaves because they were ashamed (Gen 3:8), an indication of trying to come up to God’s standard from their fallen state. Leupold comments that they saw God’s glory and presence as offensive. For them to feel no guilt shows that they were living in a perfect state and had no occasion to feel guilty. The feeling of guilt showed disharmony between God and humans.⁸⁰ There was no longer human capability for eternal existence.

After 130 years Adam had sons and daughters in his own image and likeness (Gen 5:1-3). Henry points out that Adam’s image is sinful and defiled, frail, wretched, and mortal.⁸¹ It is the reverse of the divine image and appears in an immature state; i.e., humans now needed soul-making. In

⁷⁶ Carius, 207.

⁷⁷ J.G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Dallas: Word, 1987), 30.

⁷⁸ C.F. Kiel and F. Delitzsch, “Genesis,” in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:67-92.

⁷⁹ Carius, 207.

⁸⁰ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis 1-19* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), 138.

⁸¹ Mathew Henry’s *Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 12.

the great controversy Satan's main purpose was to inflict pain and destroy the soul; but God uses his authority to protect and justify humanity and his character through his purpose/plan of redemption.

Soul-making theory rings true about human experience. The response to evil and suffering in the world does not come in a logical formula but out of actual experience. Soul-making theory recognizes that Christian faith is a pilgrimage of spiritual development.⁸² However, the weakness of this theory is that some forms of evil and suffering, such as the holocaust of the Jews, were so massive and irrational that they destroyed the soul instead of contributing to soul development.⁸³

In addition, the understanding of the doctrine of the creation of humanity is confused in soul-making theory. The statement of divine intention (Gen 1:26) is important. It shows that human beings did not merely turn out in the image of God, but were carefully designed to be such.⁸⁴ How can a morally and spiritually immature being be God's steward and representation? The "image" portrays the product of the creation, rather than the process. The creation of human beings is the final product of creation.⁸⁵

The great controversy theory demonstrates that God set a high standard in creating humankind, which was very good (Gen 1:31). At the fall Adam and Eve dropped below the benchmark God had set. Their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked (Gen 3:7). They covered themselves with fig leaves because they were ashamed (Gen 3:8). This is an indication of trying to meet God's standard from their fallen state. They saw God's glory and presence as offensive. The feeling of guilt demonstrated the new disharmony between human beings and God.⁸⁶

Further, the great controversy theory views massive and irrational evil and suffering as an attack from the adversary. People who carry out horrendous evils manifest Satan's attributes. The scripture contains records of people such as Pharaoh (Exod 6-7), Haman (Esth 3:13), and Sennacherib

⁸² T.G. Long, *What Shall We Say? Evil, Suffering and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 84.

⁸³ M.C. Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 52.

⁸⁴ Cairus, 207.

⁸⁵ J.G. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Dallas: Word, 1987), 30.

⁸⁶ Leupold, 138.

(2 Kgs 18: 28-30; 19: 9-10), who attempted to wipe out the Israelites through slavery and genocide. God permits what happens to each individual, family, community, and race (Rom 8:28). He permits Satan to attack any individual or family, as portrayed in the book of Job. He allows accidents, genocides, holocausts, and permits people to suffer because such suffering fits into his redemption strategy for unmasking and destroying Satan's power.⁸⁷ God is passionately present in times of distress. This leads to the next model, communion theory.

4. Great Controversy and Communion Theory

Communion theory provides insight into God as a compassionate deity, who suffers with his creatures and is passionately present in their moments of distress. This theory does not explain why God allowed evil and suffering from the beginning; yet it opens doors to explore God's goodness and power as he comforts and sustains the believer in moments of trial. The reality of evil and suffering is not denied; instead it is heightened. What is usually seen as something to be avoided is accepted as an experience with God.⁸⁸ In this setting the great controversy model portrays God as the incarnate redeemer, who demonstrates his saving power in taking upon himself the curse of sin and by defeating the power of evil in his death on the cross,⁸⁹ thereby providing a true demonstration of who God is and his sovereignty.

God is not detached, cold, and distant from human agonies. He is Emmanuel, God with us. If suffering is present in the history of humanity, this explains why God's goodness was demonstrated in the power of humiliation on the cross. The incarnated Christ is the proof of God's union with humanity in his suffering.⁹⁰ The conflict theory portrays God's love as the power to deliver and sustain humanity. The anguish in Gethsemane

⁸⁷ E. Christian, "The Great Controversy and Human Suffering," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10 (1999): 96 (90-98).

⁸⁸ Green, 434; see also Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, Part 3, 69; Moltmann, 5.

⁸⁹ Christian, 96.

⁹⁰ J.E. Echeverria, "The Gospel of Redemptive Suffering: Reflections on John Paul II's *Salvifici Doloris*," in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (ed. P. van Inwagen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 126 (111-47).

shows that powerlessness characterizes God's reign.⁹¹ The way of God in the world is not a display of the love of power, but a display of the power of love.

The weakness in the communion theory is that while it upholds faith in God, it does not provide reasons why evil and suffering happen. The great controversy model likewise upholds faith in God's saving power. It also identifies the origin of evil and puts forward God's plan of redemption as the divine solution to the issue of evil and suffering. Humans suffer because we live in the battlefield where evil and good are in conflict. The conflict will end when God completes his work for humanity's redemption, and that will happen at the eschaton, which brings us to the final theory to be examined.

5. Great Controversy and the Eschatological Theory

The eschatological theory is based on the belief that human life extends beyond personal death. The righteous will receive their full reward and the wicked receive their appropriate punishment at the end of time.⁹² The great controversy theory regards the end-time reward of the righteous and punishment of the wicked as the ultimate divine deliverance. This will happen when God brings to a close his redemptive work. The great controversy will end. God will physically destroy Satan (Rev 20:7-10). He will wipe away all tears. There will be no more pain, suffering and death, no more mourning (Rev 21:3- 4).

Along with the extinction of death, grief, affliction and suffering also disappear. The order of human existence marred by sin and its accompanying distress gives way to the perfect order of eternal peaceful existence.⁹³ This is the ultimate fulfilment of the plan of redemption. "They shall be my people and I will be their God" (Jer 32:38).

⁹¹ D. Neville, "God's Presence and the Power: Christology and Theodicy in Mark's Crucifixion Narrative," in *Theodicy and Eschatology* (ed. B. Barber and D. Neville; Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 25-26 (19-66).

⁹² Green, 434; see also Osborne, 74. For many Christians, this entrance into rewards is conceptualized as beginning at death. See M.J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 1175-80.

⁹³ R.H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 373.

The weakness in the eschatological theory is that it only provides hope for the future but does not address the present issue of evil and subsequent pain. It only hopes that the future will be different from what is seen now.⁹⁴ The problem of theodicy in the scripture raises the question, “How long, O Lord?” (Ps 6:1-2, 88; Dan 9:19-20; Hab 1:2; Rev 6:10). Texts of this kind show that theodicy is not simply an intellectual exercise; it is an intense and desperate search for meaning. This quest for meaning was answered by offering an eschatological solution (Dan 12:2-3). It was revealed that in the future God will ultimately solve the problem of evil and human suffering.⁹⁵ In view of the great controversy, eschatology can be seen as a logical development in response to the experience of evil and suffering. The present, however trying, can be understood as a step on the way to realization of God’s redemptive purpose.⁹⁶

Examining the five different theories in conjunction with the great controversy theory reveals that the problem of evil and suffering happens as the outcome of the great conflict. This world is a war zone in the great struggle between God and Satan. Christian notes that in the war zone, both people and the land are affected. Life in a war zone is dangerous. Crops are ruined, forests destroyed, water is poisoned, roads and fields are mined, bombs fall on unexpected areas, people starve, suffer, and die.⁹⁷ Both natural and moral evils are the result of the fall and rebellion. Satan is able to cause natural disaster and disease to destroy the environment and people.

CONCLUSION

Evil belongs to the syllabus of religion, which is expected to say something about the nature, source, and consequences of evil. How has evil developed and to what extent does it affect humanity? Can it be eradicated? Different theories have been developed as a response to the problem of evil and human suffering. Classical or Greater Good theory reconciles the existence

⁹⁴ F. Sontag, “Anthropodicy and the Return of God,” in Davis, *Encountering Evil*, 142 (137-60).

⁹⁵ B. Barber, “Theodicy, Eschatology and Postmodernity,” in Barber and Neville, *Theodicy and Eschatology*, 202 (201-207).

⁹⁶ M. O’Brien, “Theodicy and Eschatology; Old Testament Considerations,” in Barber and Neville, *Theodicy and Eschatology*, 16 (1-18).

⁹⁷ Christian, 92.

of evil in the world with the doctrine of all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God. The usual conclusion of this theory is that God allowed evil to exist in order to bring about something good. However, the problem with this is that the compatibility of God and the apparent pointlessness of much evil is questionable. When evaluating this theory in view of Great Controversy theory, the existence of evil is not the reason for God to bring about greater good. Evil exists because of God's goodness in giving free will choices to both the angels and human beings. God has the power to control the apparent pointlessness of evil yet his goodness does not allow him to manipulate the free will choices of his created beings.

The Free Will theory builds on the idea that evil resulted from the creatures' free will. The fault, then, lies with God's created beings and not with the all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good creator. The great controversy theory also accepts the fact that God created both the angels and humankind as free moral beings. The scripture is clear on the role of free will in the origin of evil. Lucifer was blameless from the day God created him till wickedness was found in him (Ezek 28:15). However, the weakness and the long-standing challenge to the free will theory is that it does not offer answers to natural evil. Natural evil occurs causing human suffering and pain outside of our free will choices.

Among many theories given as to how evil arose and why God allowed its existence is the suggestion that evil originated with a war in heaven over God's authority. The books of Ezekiel (28:1-19) and Isaiah (14: 4-23) in the OT and the book of Revelation (12:7-10) in the NT provide the background of the origin of evil and the cosmic conflict between good and evil. The conflict began with Lucifer, who envied God's power and sowed dissention among his angelic colleagues. The dissention led to open conflict with God and, as a result, Lucifer and his followers were cast out of heaven (Ezek 28:16, Rev 12:7-9).

In the great controversy God's law was one of the components that was attacked. Satan, disguised as a serpent, challenged Eve to choose independently rather than obey God's law (Gen 3:4). The serpent's suggestions promised that violation of God's command would bring freedom. In the process human freedom to act independently was attacked and undermined. The serpent claimed to know what God knew, just as Lucifer boasted that he would be like God (Isa 14:13-14). God's love and

justice were also questioned by the serpent in the controversy in the garden. In the same way, in accusing God for forgiving and accepting Joshua (Zech 3:1-5), Satan argues that God can only bring justice against the violator of the law and that it is unjust to show mercy. Finally, the relationship between God and humanity was confronted. God is a relational deity whose purpose for creating free moral beings was to have a free loving relationship with them. God's searching for humankind at the Fall proves his desire to reclaim his creation and bring it back to himself (Gen 3:8).

God's rescue plan, the plan of redemption, is the only and ultimate solution to the problem of evil and human suffering. The redemption plan became a reality through Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. At his coming he was met by the adversary who sought to destroy him. The purpose of Satan's attack was to stop God's plan of redemption by using King Herod to kill the Son of God. When his physical attempt to kill Jesus was defeated, Satan attacked him through spiritual temptation and was again defeated (Matt 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). Christ's death on the cross is the climax of the four gospels and this is where provision was made for the plan of redemption to be fully accomplished. Satan was unmasked. The death of Christ confirmed Satan's character as the instigator of all kinds of evil and human suffering, and showed to the world God's willingness to sacrifice everything to restore his creation.