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## **The Threshold of Victory: Theodicy and Relief in the Theology of John Paul II**

### **Abstract**

The Twentieth Century provided the religious and irreligious alike with tremendous challenges in regards to belief. Evil and carnage were pervasive and the Church was in decline. In that cultural moment rose an interpreter of that challenge who theodicy was clear and efficient in answering the complex challenge of evil in the modern world. John Paul II, more than almost any other figure of the age, addressed the vexing issue of evil in the modern world. In the corpus of his writing mankind comes to know evil through an act of memory, remembering from where evil sprang, and what evil has done in man to separate him from his creator. And mankind comes to terms with identity of evil as seen and experienced through the act of suffering. Through processing memory, and examining identity, mankind can discover how Jesus Christ's work on Calvary places us at the threshold of victory.

### **Keywords**

Pope John Paul II, Christology, evil, suffering, soteriology.

### **1. Introduction**

It is with great sadness we observe that to be human is to experience suffering. No one escapes this reality, indeed reality is marked by the presence of pain. Mankind in its history has always sought a way to deaden pain, eliminate

suffering and in some way escape reality. We alter moods, pursue passions, seek after emotional highs, and anesthetize ourselves into bliss; all to return to the cold hard hangover of pain. Regardless of the various escape attempts, human beings seem bound to an on-going cycle of suffering. When escape is denied, the human mind begins to seek relief by pondering the source of suffering.

If we can devise the cause of suffering then perhaps we can learn to mitigate its effects and prevent its prevalence. To that end, within the corpus of human thought there exists two presuppositions from which spring all theories concerning suffering and its source: those who deny theism and those affirm theism. Those who deny theism, who reject the existence of God, escape the burden of sourcing suffering through the maze of evolutionary problems and probabilities. Suffering and evil are made relative and the need to provide an answer is diminished. For those who affirm theism, who believe in a creator God, an answer for suffering's source is essential to maintaining belief. Their very certainty in a creator God, one who is good, who creates purposefully, demands a response to the prevalence of seemingly purposeless suffering and evil. Few centuries in recorded human history produced more seemingly purposeless suffering than the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The response to this evil and suffering by theists, Catholics in particular and the century's final Pope John Paul II in specific, will be our focus here.

The twentieth century represented a turning point in the history of theological thought on evil and suffering. Catholicism, theologically and practically speaking, had remained largely unchanged since the council of Trent four hundred years earlier.<sup>1</sup> By the century's mid-point it had become clear that the growing prevalence of evil in the world and the resulting suffering presented a undeniable challenge to the Church. To quote Emil Brunner, „we have become increasingly aware that in the course of some fifteen centuries something like a Christian civilization has been created, and of the other fact that in our days this Christian civilization is at stake and its survival is questioned...”<sup>2</sup> The events of the second world war, the subsequent rise and proliferation of world communism, and the advent of the atomic weapons age presented the Christian, the Catholic in particular, with significant theological challenge.

To that challenge, Catholics responded in 1962 with the opening of the Second Vatican Council. The modern world had been marked by „the success

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*. vol. 2, San Francisco: Harper Collins 1985, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> J. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*. vol. 2, p. 330.

of evil, physical pain, mental anguish the prevalence and intensity of sin...”<sup>3</sup>, where „the artist, the seer, and the saint” had been replaced by „the soldier, the engineer, and the man of political power.”<sup>4</sup> Vatican II was meant to redeem the relevance of the Church, to „build a bridge between the Church and the modern world.”<sup>5</sup> Vatican II as an „intellectual, spiritual and cultural event in the life of the Church [was] unprecedented.”<sup>6</sup> What was begun in Vatican II by John XXIII and finished by Paul VI, would be interpreted and applied to great effect by their successor John Paul II.

Pope John Paul II, elected in 1978,<sup>7</sup> would serve as not only the chief interpreter of Vatican II, but also as an intellectual bridge between both the Church and the modern world, and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In examining his response to evil and the prevalence of suffering, John Paul II functions as a lens through which we see the Church’s history and doctrine on the subject post Vatican II. Our effort here will be to examine the on-point writings, encyclicals, and homilies of John Paul II on the topic of evil and suffering; specifically his 1984 encyclical *Salvifici Doloris*. We will see that John Paul’s treatment is best when considered under two headings: memory, the source and elements of evil; and identity,<sup>8</sup> the existence, function and meaning of suffering through Christ. We will see how the work of Christ intensifies, redeems and ultimately prevails over evil; allowing humanity to stand at the threshold of victory, not conquered by evil but rather overcoming evil with good. We will then conclude by evaluating the consistency of his thoughts in relation to Catholic tradition, the Biblical basis for his assertions, and finally an evangelical evaluation of his theology.

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<sup>3</sup> John Henry Cardinal Newman, quoted from „Evidence of an Original Fall”, G. Brand (ed.), *Catholicism: The Meaning of Catholicism. The organic unity of the Christian Experience*, New York: 1962, George Braziller Publishers, 61.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity. vol. 2*, p. 330.

<sup>5</sup> J. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity. vol. 2*, p. 352.

<sup>6</sup> T. Rowland, „Reclaiming the Tradition: John Paul II as the Authentic Interpreter of Vatican II”. From Honea, Charla H. *A Readers Companion to Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press. 1996. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Bamber G., *Christianity. A History*, Carroll and Graf. New York 2003, 209.

<sup>8</sup> Memory and Identity as headings are borrowed from JP II’s 2005 book, of the same name, *Memory and Identity: conversations at the dawn of the millennium*, New York 2005: Rizzoli Pub.

## 2. Memory

Evil at times seems overwhelming, ever-present, and poised to conquer humanity. God in His goodness created man and called him good. Man in his freedom chose the absence of God, the absence of Good, and plunged humanity into sin. The result of that initial choice is our current fallen world. „At its deepest level, evil is the tragic rejection of the demands of love.”<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II was constantly confronted with the results of man’s rejection of love. For him the twentieth century represented an „eruption of evil,” played out primarily in the ideological and military struggles of Europe under fascism and communism.<sup>10</sup> Yet despite these great evils and privations of God’s love, John Paul II saw good prevailing and made manifest in the midst of these horrors. To understand how good prevails, one must first examine the definition of evil and what it represents, in order to discern what it is humanity is up against.

## 3. Evil: Defined

The definition of evil within the thought of John Paul II has three elements. Evil represents a deficit, a challenge to God and a reality that must be faced and ultimately overcome. Evil is primarily a deficit of good, „the absence of some good which ought to be present in a given being; it is a privation.”<sup>11</sup> Within God’s created order of good, where that good is not completely present, evil exists. The privation first came to be experienced by man in the fall.

The fall represented man’s challenge to God. God created man, called him good set him about the task of living. Man was created a „conscious, free being, *homo viator*.”<sup>12</sup> When man sinned and turned from God he exercised his God given freedom of conscious to deny the good God had proclaimed. Evil

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<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II, „*Do Not Be Overcome with Evil but Overcome Evil with Good*.” Message for World Day of Peace, 2005. Vatican Published, December 8, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity. Conversations at the Dawn of the Millennium*, New York 2005: Rizzoli Pub., 3.

<sup>11</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of the Millennium*. New York 2005: Rizzoli Pub., 3.

<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, „*The Problem of Evil: Evil in Free Human Person*.” The Holy Father’s Message to the Third Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas. June 21, 2002.

then is an attempted coup of God's divine order, man supplanting the rule of his created mind over the dominion of his creator. John Paul freely admits that why this came to be, how man came to do this is still unknown, „the way in which evil grows from the pure soil of good is a mystery.”<sup>13</sup> But that it has come to pass, and now exists is a reality which cannot be denied. Evil on earth began with the first privation of man's limited will choosing his good rather than God's. This was a challenge to God's authority, and continues to be played out in the reality of evil in the world around us. For John Paul, evil becomes a reality through the evil acts perpetrated by free choosing soul in rebellion against God. He outlines this reality in His message to the World Day of Peace in 2005: “Evil is not some impersonal, deterministic force at work in the world. It is the result of human freedom. Freedom, which distinguishes human beings from every other creature on earth, is ever present at the heart of the drama of evil. *Evil always has a name and a face*: the name and faces of those men and women who freely choose it. Sacred Scriptures teaches that at the dawn of history, Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and Abel was killed by Cain, his brother. These were the first wrong choices, which were succeeded by countless others down through the centuries. Each of these choices had an intrinsic moral dimension, involving specific individual responsibilities and the fundamental relationship of each person with God, with other and with all creation.”<sup>14</sup>

According to John Paul II, evil then is defined as the deficit of God's goodness, brought about by the free choice of man to challenge God's authority, represented in the reality of evil actions perpetuated by the continuous sinful choices made by men and women today. Reconciled within man is the notion that something bad can exist in something created good, and that privation or „lack of something” can actually be made manifest through action<sup>15</sup>This

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<sup>13</sup> He does his best to relate the coexistence of good and evil to the Jesus' parable in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 13. In the parable Jesus describes good grain which is thrown into the weeds, the servants ask, ‘do you want us to go gather the weeds?’ Jesus replied ‘No, for in gathering the weeds you uproot the wheat as well, both of them will grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers to collect the weeds first to be burnt, but the wheat into my store house.’ *Memory and Identity* 4. Good and evil seem co-exist, but ultimately one will be set out for destruction the other for use.

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II, „*Do Not Be Overcome with Evil but Overcome Evil with Good.*” Message for World Day of Peace, 2005 Vatican Published, December 8, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> The Holy Father's Message to the Third Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas. „The Problem of Evil: Evil in Free Human Person.” June 21, 2002. John Paul II describes this a “meta-anthropology” that human beings are and at the same time

reconciliation in evil, as we will see later on, can only be overcome through the reconciliation of sin and life in the suffering work of Christ on the cross.<sup>16</sup> Now that evil has been defined we would be well served in examining three characteristic elements represented in evil.

Seeing evil defined as a deficit, a challenge and a reality leads us to examine how these relate and interact with man and his relationship with God, his creator. We observe the first characteristic that evil, as deficit, is rooted in sin within the life of man. Here John Paul II merges his own thoughts with one of the products of Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*<sup>17</sup> and quotes from it at length in his book *Memory and Identity*. Sin represents the chief act and example of evil, in depriving man from his God and depriving him from his created goodness: “When man looks into his own heart, he finds that he is drawn down toward what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from his good creator. Often refusing to acknowledge God as his source, man has also upset the relationship which should link him to his last end; and at the same time he has broken the right order that should reign within himself as well as between himself and other men... man is therefore divided in himself... For sin brought man to a lower state, forcing him away from the completeness that is his to attain.”<sup>18</sup>

„Sin is not an abstract theory,” it is the quantifiable consequences of man’s „refusal to live according to God’s teaching.”<sup>19</sup> It exhibits a privation of God’s teaching and hence a privation of God’s goodness. Evil is rooted in sin, but it also represents something to be saved from.

The second characteristic that marks evil is that it represents a state that requires salvation. Man must be saved out of evil, he cannot deliver himself. He has the strength and ability, one might even argue the propensity to fall into evil; but he lacks the power to escape evil’s grasp of sin and death. Evil is so pervasive in the divided mind of man that he cannot see a way out in and of himself. „Human ‘evil’ is constituted by the Evil One or instigated by him is also presented

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become, the exist and at the same time being created, „in the human being, great diversities are reconciled: the one and the many, body and soul, male and female, the person and the family, the individual and society, nature and history.”

<sup>16</sup> Colossians 1:20 and 2 Corinthians 5:18 (English Standard Version 2012).

<sup>17</sup> The pastoral constitution on the Church and the modern world, promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965.

<sup>18</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, selectively quoted by John Paul II in *Memory and Identity*, 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> „Do Not Be Overcome with Evil but Overcome Evil with Good.” Message for World Day of Peace, 2005. Vatican Published, December 8, 2004.

in our time in an attractive form that seduces minds and hearts so as to cause the very sense of evil and sin to be lost.”<sup>20</sup> Evil envelopes man in a cloud of illusion, blinding him its strengths and effects. Man must be liberated from this darkness by an act of salvation. Jesus Christ preformed the very act necessary for this liberation, and in John Paul’s ecclesiology, the Church serves as the light of this glorious truth. Quoting *Gaudium*, he says, „the mystery of man finds its solution only in the light of the mystery of Christ.”<sup>21</sup> The Church alone is to display the light of Christ’s mystery into a dark world, liberating and saving souls from an on-going cycle of evil. So we see that the characteristics of evil are that it is rooted in sin, it demands salvation, and finally it represents a state to be defeated by Jesus Christ.

The third and final characteristic of evil in John Paul’s conception is that evil represents something to be and yet already defeated by Jesus Christ. Evil as the absence of love and goodness is defeated by the paramount act of love and goodness of Christ suffering on the cross. Jesus on His cross, steals from evil the only weapon it possesses; that of death. In overcoming death Jesus overcame evil; moreover man, rather than being overcome by evil, now is able to overcome evil with good in Jesus Christ. His victory at the cross then, is our promise of victory now, and our hope for ultimate deliverance to come. Evil is defeated through the power of love, love displayed by Christ on the cross, therefore we „triumph over evil” when we grow in the love of the Father.<sup>22</sup> Christ and His cross are our only source of spiritual defense in the face of evil, and are our promise of ultimate eschatological victory.<sup>23</sup>

So in the assessment of John Paul II, mankind comes to know evil through an act of memory, remembering from where evil sprang, and what evil has done in man to separate him from his creator. Next we will explore the identity of evil as seen and experienced through suffering.

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<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II, „*Fight Evil and Sin with Determination.*” General Audience Address, August 18, 1999. Vatican Published, August 25, 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Pope John Paul II, „*The Problem of Evil: Evil in Free Human Person.*” The Holy Father’s Message to the Third Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas. June 21, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> „*Conquer Evil by Growing in God’s Love.*” The Holy Father meets Roman Youth and answers questions on March 25, 1999. Published by the Vatican, April 14, 1999.

<sup>23</sup> *Memory and Identity*, 19.

## 4. Identity

Evil is manifestly tied to the experience of suffering, suffering as result of sin, as the consequences of separation from God, and as the real experience of every sinful human being. Suffering is not merely a solitary experience but a transcendent bond which ties every sufferer together in solidarity to each other; and every sufferer to their God who shared their suffering in Christ.<sup>24</sup> Jesus Christ, though He knew no sin was made sin on our account so that we might become righteous.<sup>25</sup> Suffering is an identifiable trait of humanity, and a promised mark of the messiah.<sup>26</sup> This common tie is not accidental; it is an example of God's omnipotence. John Paul writes, „If suffering is present in the history of humanity, one understands why [God's] omnipotence was manifested in the omnipotence of humiliation on the Cross... Christ is proof of God's solidarity with man in his suffering.”<sup>27</sup> We shall now examine suffering in its function, asking what it does, and we then examine suffering against the history of, and future promises in, Christ.

## 5. Suffering: Its Function

Suffering fills three primary functions within the corpus of John Paul's thought. It serves to unite us to each other, it serves to unite us to Christ, and it provides an opportunity for redemption to be made manifest in the Cross of Christ. Nowhere in Holy Father's thought is the topic of suffering addressed with greater specificity than in his Apostolic Encyclical of February 1984, *Salvifici Doloris*. We will now examine each of these functions as they present themselves within *Salvifici*.

Suffering, while the primary example of subjective human experience, has an objective reality which supersedes its temporary effects. In the work of John Paul we see that suffering is in fact salvific, hence the title of his encyclical,

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<sup>24</sup> Pope John Paul II, „*Salvifici Doloris*” the Apostolic Encyclical of the Supreme Pontiff to the Bishops, to the Priests, to the religious families and to the Faithful of the Catholic Church, February 11, 1984.

<sup>25</sup> 2 Cor. 5:21.

<sup>26</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Pope John Paul II., *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. New York 1995: Alfred Knopf, 63.



*Salvifici Dolores* or Salvific Suffering. In other words suffering is never merely punitive nor is it futile, it exists to serve a purpose. Suffering attends every generation of man, and „in a certain sense co-exists with him in the word, and thus demands to be constantly reconsidered.”<sup>28</sup> While suffering exists within the animal world through pain, „only the human being knows that he is suffering and wonders why...”<sup>29</sup> As the *Imago Dei* and bearer of the divine given trait of reason, man not only experiences suffering but is able to seek meaning in the suffering. In this humans are united to one another as they question and seek a reason for suffering. This shared experience creates solidarity between human beings, and a unity with them and their suffering savior Christ.

The second function of suffering is that it unites us to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. „God himself came to save us and to deliver us from evil.”<sup>30</sup> This deliverance comes through the act of gracious and loving suffering Christ endured on the cross. John Paul II builds upon the key verse of John 3:16 to illustrate the work of God in Christ’s suffering: „For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”. These words, spoken by Christ in his conversation with Nicodemus, introduce us into the very heart of God’s salvific work. They also express the very essence of Christian soteriology, that is, of the theology of salvation. Salvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering. According to the words spoken to Nicodemus, God gives his Son to „the world” to free man from evil, which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering.<sup>31</sup>

Key to understanding the nature between suffering, Christ and man is the word „gave.” God Gave, God delivered His Son to the experience of suffering, as prophesied in the Old Testament, to be a suffering savior. He is united to man in the common experience of suffering, but still Lord over man in that by His suffering, evil was overcome.

The third function of suffering is found in the *Felix Culpa* or fortunate fault. The presence of evil and suffering in the world while egregious and difficult to understand, provides God with an opportunity to display mercy and redemption. The glory inherent in that redemption pierces the darkness of suffering

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<sup>28</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Memory and Identity*, 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 14.

with the hope of salvation. Its brightness by contrast makes earthly suffering pail by comparison. John Paul writes, „even though the victory over sin and death achieved by Christ in his Cross and Resurrection does not abolish temporal suffering from human life, nor free from suffering the whole historical dimension of human existence, it nevertheless throws a new light upon this dimension and upon every suffering: the light of salvation.”<sup>32</sup> This is reflected in the Easter Hymn sung by all the Church „*O felix culpa, quae talem ad tantum meruit habere redemptorem*” (Oh happy fault,, which gained for us so great a redemption.)<sup>33</sup> So Suffering serves as a unifying force, uniting us to each other, uniting us to God, and providing the venue for Christ’s act of redemption. We shall now examine, in greater detail, the identity of suffering before, through, and after Christ, and how Christ’s suffering provides the threshold of our victory over evil and suffering.

## 6. Suffering and Jesus Christ

For John Paul II, Jesus Christ is the lens through which the history of human suffering is seen and thereby redeemed. Christ adds meaning to suffering in the past and redeems suffering in the present. There are then three stages to suffering in relation to Christ: suffering before Christ’s advent, suffering through Christ’s passion, and finally Suffering redeemed through Christ’s resurrection.

Before the advent of Christ, suffering existed with little purpose but to describe the human condition in sin and to point forward to the kind of messiah Jesus would be.<sup>34</sup> The Old Testament provided a catalogue of human suffering, indeed John Paul describes it as a „Great Book of suffering.”<sup>35</sup> Suffering, if left in this condition, would be very little consolation indeed; a method of divine judgment and an imprimatur of the fallen human condition. But within the suffering servant of Isaiah, we see the glimmers of hope within the gospel, of one who would share our suffering and save mankind. With the advent of Christ, this glimmer would beam with glorious brilliance.

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<sup>32</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Pope John Paul II., *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, New York 1995: Alfred Knopf, 21.

<sup>34</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 6.

Christ's advent represented not only the turning point of history but the event through which suffering would be given meaning. The existence of suffering provides the canvas upon which God paints his miracle of mercy. Here John Paul writes in *Salvifici*: "Christ goes towards his Passion and death with full awareness of the mission that he has to fulfill precisely in this way. Precisely by means of this suffering he must bring it about „that man should not perish, but have eternal life". Precisely by means of his Cross He must strike at the roots of evil, planted in the history of man and in human souls. Precisely by means of his Cross He must accomplish the work of salvation. This work, in the plan of eternal Love, has a redemptive character."<sup>36</sup>

Christ suffers in proportions that no mere man could bear, it is in His Passion we see the depth of God's love. John Paul Goes on to describe the unique work on the Cross through Christ's suffering: "Behold, He, though innocent, takes upon himself the sufferings of all people, because he takes upon himself the sins of all. „The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all": all human sin in its breadth and depth becomes the true cause of the Redeemer's suffering. If the suffering 'is measured' by the evil suffered, then the words of the Prophet enable us to understand the extent of this evil and suffering with which Christ burdened himself. It can be said that this is 'substitutive' suffering; but above all it is 'redemptive'... in his suffering, sins are cancelled out precisely because he alone as the only-begotten Son could take them upon himself, accept them with that love for the Father which overcomes the evil of every sin; in a certain sense he annihilates this evil in the spiritual space of the relationship between God and humanity, and fills this space with good."<sup>37</sup>

Suffering gains new meaning in Christ's work, but it gains a new redemptive perspective in His resurrection.

Suffering prior to Christ is seen as futile, suffering through Christ's passion is seen as uniting us to Himself through bearing our guilt, finally suffering is redeemed in its entirety through Christ's resurrection. Christ's act of resurrection shatters the paradigm of evil and suffering; their effects and power. Christ „rose again to break the stranglehold of the evil one, so that [the world] might be fashioned anew to God's design."<sup>38</sup> John Paul II writes, „In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering

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<sup>36</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 16.

<sup>38</sup> *Memory and Identity*, 21.

to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.” Suffering is no longer a meaningless or confusing affliction, it has a purpose, it has been redeemed. Christ accomplishes his unique mission, „The mission of the only-begotten Son consists in conquering sin and death. He conquers sin by his obedience unto death, and he overcomes death by his Resurrection.”<sup>39</sup> In overcoming death suffering loses its eternal effect. Suffering is only definitive if it is experienced through eternal death and separation from God, Jesus came precisely to confound this plan.

The opposite of salvation is not, therefore, only temporal suffering, any kind of suffering, but the definitive suffering: the loss of eternal life, being rejected by God, damnation. The only-begotten Son was given to humanity primarily to protect man against this definitive evil and against definitive suffering. In his salvific mission, the Son must therefore strike evil right at its transcendental roots from which it develops in human history.<sup>40</sup>

For John Paul II, this message lies at the heart of the gospel and is the source of all joy amidst temporal earthly suffering. „His Joy especially spreads through the good news, according to which *good is greater than all that is evil in the world*. Evil, in fact, is neither fundamental nor definitive.”<sup>41</sup> Christ’s work of redemption redeems all of creation, not just suffering, it „elevates the work of creation to a new level... creation becomes permeated with a redemptive sanctification.”<sup>42</sup> This leads us to the culmination to John Paul’s conception of evil and suffering.

The joy which arises from the knowledge of Christ’s redemptive work in the gospel does not serve to eliminate suffering, but to add perspective and give it a meaning which supersedes its experience. We have victory in Christ, but the „joy of the victory over evil does not obfuscate--it actually intensifies--the realistic awareness of the existence of evil in the world and in every man.” This is an outcome that can only be described as a paradox. Knowledge of evil’s defeat, rather than muting evil, makes it more pronounced. The fact that in the presence of a great light, the darkness seems all the more dark. The promise of the Gospel is that we are to „call good and evil by name,” moreover, we will not be conquered by evil but rather we will conquer evil with good.<sup>43</sup> For John

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<sup>39</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 14.

<sup>40</sup> *Salvifici*, Sec. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. New York 1995: Alfred Knopf, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. New York 1995: Alfred Knopf, 22.

<sup>43</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. New York 1995: Alfred Knopf, 22.

Paul II, evil exists, and suffering is real, but though the redemption of Christ's Cross and resurrection we stand at the threshold of victory, living out God's love as a foretaste of the culmination of love to come with the coming of the Son. „all this evil is present in the world partly to awaken our love, our self-gift in generous and disinterested service to those visited by suffering. In the love that pours forth from the heart of Christ, we find hope for the future of the world. Christ has redeemed the world”,<sup>44</sup> and „by His wounds, we are healed.”

## 7. Conclusion

In our conclusions we shall briefly examine the views of John Paul II considering three criteria; whether he is consistent with Catholic Doctrine, whether the basis of his belief biblical, and finally we shall give an evangelical evaluation of his view.

It will come as no surprise that the Pope's views are consistent with Catholic Doctrine. But there are several areas of note which display particular consistencies. First is his privative definition of evil. By his own admission this is borrowed from the Thomistic tradition and that of Augustine.<sup>45</sup> Notable too is his insistence on the unity we share with God through Christ's suffering. The motif of divine suffering has been advocated by some continental Catholics including some conservatives.<sup>46</sup> Present too is the idea of the universality of Christ's work and the notion that its redemptive effects are not only available to all men, but experienced by all men. Which seems to be in keeping with a more inclusivist notion of salvation and the experience of its benefits.

Present within much of John Paul's writing is the allusion to scripture, sometimes scripture is quoted outright, there seems to be a heavy reliance on Conciliar documents and their interpretation. Present within his works is what some call the biblical „meta-narrative”, the idea of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation; all of which are rooted firmly in the narrative arch of Scripture. These elements are present in John Paul's thought and find their way into his writings.

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<sup>44</sup> *Memory and Identity*, 168.

<sup>45</sup> Pope John Paul II, „*The Problem of Evil: Evil in Free Human Person*.” The Holy Father's Message to the Third Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of St. Thomas Aquinas. June 21, 2002.

<sup>46</sup> R. Bauckham, *Only the Suffering God Can help' divine passibility in modern Theology*, “Themelios” 9.3 (April 1984), pp. 6-12.

There seems to be sound biblical basis underlying most of John Paul's thought's on evil and suffering.

Catholic theologians by virtue of their reliance on tradition seem to have a vocabulary and ease with some concepts that evangelicals struggle to grasp. This appears to be the case with John Paul II. With relative ease he traverses the rocky roads of suffering and evil handling every turn with confidence and surety. Evangelicals rightly would find his verbiage attractive and even at times inspiring. The power of Jesus Christ and His efficacious work on the cross are themes that permeate John Paul's writing. The cross has an unparalleled space within the universe and a meaning which transcends, indeed redeems all manner of evil and suffering that man might experience. What one might notice, with an evangelical eye, is the emphasis of the paschal mystery and suffering work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. The role of Christ as sufferer dominates John Paul's message, and provides the means through which we gain unity with and knowledge of Christ. One cannot help but think of the 2004 film *The Passion of the Christ*, based on the book by Anne Catherine Emmerich *The Dolores Passion of Jesus Christ*<sup>47</sup>. Both of which emphasized the brutal suffering of Christ, during his trial, scourging and crucifixion. In both accounts and one could argue in John Paul's treatment of evil and suffering, the suffering of Christ almost eclipses his resurrection. Even the title of John Paul's Apostolic Encyclical 1984, was entitled, „Salvific Suffering.” One sees far more emphasis on the part of evangelicals on the resurrection of Christ. While Christ's sufferings were atrocious, and emblematic of the sinful world He came to save, it was and is only through His resurrection that evil is defeated and experience of suffering is redeemed in hope.

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<sup>47</sup> Published in 1928, Reprinted: Rockford 1983, IL: Tan Books and Pub.

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