Chapter 8

Suffering the Good: Constructing Solidarity In the Theodicies of Scripture and Thérèse of Lisieux.

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In the Jewish and Christian traditions, to know is to suffer. First, the fall of Adam and Eve brings knowledge of good and evil, which entails enculturation into a *habitus* in which clothing the body and tilling the soil seem vital. Then, the fall of the Watchers endows humanity with other divine epistemologies—not the least of which are cosmetics—and leads to a catastrophic flood of that soil. That these divine incursions into the world are the cause of suffering gives rise to the problem of theodicy, that is, the disquieting suspicion that a good God allows us to feel pain we have not brought upon ourselves. Each of us will suffer,

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187 Gen 6:1–4; 1 En. 15:2–3.
188 The enigmatic nature of theodicy is framed nicely by Martha Nussbaum: “We should not confuse Greek religion with Judaeo-Christian religion, where it is generally true that the actions of God are to be received as the mysterious doings of a basically moral
whether by natural or by manmade disaster. This, not sin, according to Wendy Farley, is “at the center of the problem of evil.”

Suffering being a given, the individual has two options: to turn inward toward the self and sacrifice the world or to turn outward toward the world and sacrifice the self. Farley sees erotic faith as the proper response to suffering. Love, to be properly accomplished, desires justice for the other. As the other is of necessity bound to and defined by finitude and mortality, so too does justice locate itself in the present rather than in a distant moment in the eschatological future. In this essay, I will explore the ways in which Farley attaches the pursuit of justice to suffering and martyrdom, focusing particularly on the example of her later work of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. The transformation of the individual comes in the individual’s capacity to transcend the grief of suffering and to continue to direct compassion and love toward others in the world. As illustrated by St. Thérèse’s interpretation of her tuberculosis as an act of divine charity to wrestle with the doubts in her faith that emerged from being barred from male ecclesiastical roles (e.g., priest, Doctor of the Church, soldier), the suffering individual uses the logic of the incarnation to direct spiritual efforts not to envisioning heavenly crowns and thrones, but to using her life and very body as the clay that participates in transforming the incarnation. The civic martyr thus sharpens Adorno’s maxim: “the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.”

The tragedy of her demise throws into relief the values that we should hold fast in the world.

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Suffering

That suffering is on par with actual martyrdom has been a Christian theological principle since at least the late first century CE letter of 1 Clement. Clement of Rome instructs the Corinthians who have


recently ousted their presbyters to sacrifice their own positions in the community for the sake of unity. He equates: 1) the sacrifices made by kings who exiled themselves during plagues, 2) individuals who sold themselves into slavery and death for the sake of another, 3) women who died as martyrs in the arena, and 4) the biblical heroines of Esther and Judith. What did Esther and Judith, who end their narratives triumphantly in their own homes, do to warrant inclusion in a list of sacrifice and martyrdom? Presumably the answer is that Esther and Judith both willingly flirted with sexual violence as a last resort to save their nation. Ancient and modern commentators on Esther have speculated that Esther might well have preferred death to the wretched isolation of being a hidden Jew in the Persian court, susceptible at any time to suffer the same relegation to the harem as Vashti and the virgins who preceded Esther in Ahasuerus’ bedroom.

In Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion, Farley is perhaps more precise than the Apostolic Fathers—who did not yet have access even to Augustine’s concept of interiority—in locating the equivalency of suffering and martyrdom in the effect of the external situation rather than the external situation itself. We may strain to see the “death camps, torture chambers, or famine-stricken countries” as merely “more dramatic examples” of the destructive force of suffering. However, the internal state that these grim physical conditions stimulate is the same as that occasioned by more banal conditions such as the desperate housewife and the “Willy Lomans of the world.” The human spirit has a myriad of evils, unleashed since Hesiod inscribed them into Pandora’s jar, that can cause the soul to lose hope and despair. For the Greeks, such a condition meant to believe in the Olympic deities, who were not always benevolently inclined toward humanity. For Kristeva, such despair entails atheism, a giving up of a hope that is, in a Christian spiritual economy, God. However, in all cases, it is clear that the snakes that bite away human

191 1 Clement 55.
193 Farley, Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion, 118.
happiness are not restricted to a theological-historical moment in the
Garden of Eden but follow us through life, springing up incessantly as
though from the head of the Hydra.

When experiencing the suffering that inexorably confronts humans
as they plod through the divine plan, the challenge for the individual thus
becomes how to continue to live without allowing suffering to triumph
over one’s existence. Farley cites Simone Weil’s axiom that at “the very
best, he who is branded by affliction will keep only half his soul.”196
Radical suffering so scars the individual that he or she can neither savor
life nor even momentarily escape from the experience of trauma.
Tolkien’s Frodo exemplifies the irreversibly traumatized soul: “I am
naked in the dark, Sam, and there is no veil between me and the wheel of
fire.”197 Such permanent occlusion of sense-perception by the suffering
soul was conjectured by Augustine to be the “unforgivable sin.”198
Likewise, Farley observes that radical suffering is an incurable wound that
prevents an individual from fully participating in his or her future. This is
not the gaping wound of the Auschwitz gallows that Wiesel found
redemptive; it is the refusal to allow the moments of life after the trauma
to count as admissible evidence.199

Humans sometimes must endure existence—for not simply a day
or a year, but the course of their entire lifespans—in a network of relations
designed to dehumanize and demoralize them. Examples range from the
South African apartheid system to the Nazi death camps. Farley contends
that the goal of the designers of these vices of human souls is to “produce
in the victim a ‘self-disgust’ to the point of wanting death or even
committing suicide.”200 This can, I think, particularly be seen in the case of
the Nazis, who had the benefit of scholarly work done on sacrifice. The
Nazi desire that the victim accede to self-destruction resonates with the
“myth of innocence” connected to ancient Greek animal sacrifice, a myth
that was beginning to be identified by structuralists as underpinning

Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).
200 Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 54; Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of
Future Jewish Thought* (New York: Schocken, 1982), 12.
In ancient Greece, sacrificial animals were made to nod their assent by water thrown on their heads and to reveal the sacrificial weapon in the dust with their own hooves by a carefully guided rope. This was the logic deployed by the Nazis, who also transported their victims to the death camps in train cars meant for freight or livestock while retaining their victims’ humanity in name only by booking them as passengers.

Hannah Arendt, as Farley reminds us, employed language games that transmogrified genocide into the “final solution” and murder into “evacuation” (Aussiedlung) or “special treatment” (Sonderbehandlung).

Thus, though everyone in Nazi Germany knew what was happening, they lost the epistemology that would have told them what was happening was “murder and lies.” It was not simply that the Jews were losing their lives; they were also losing the language that would have validated the horror of this experience as such. The physical suffering of the Shoah was compounded by the psychological and linguistic suffering of the Shoah.

Farley names this psychological and linguistic suffering as the most extreme violence that occurs to a human being. Barred from access to language, the individual loses even the capacity to describe humiliation and pain. The victim has been deprived of the basic right to self-defense. This is the same conclusion, we will remember, of George Orwell’s 1984, where the protagonist has been broken by his worst fear, rats, and proceeds to so meld his mind with that of his oppressors that they allow him to wander the metropolitan bars before exterminating him like a rat on the street. Farley, though, goes further. For Farley, the soul displaced by radical suffering has been forcibly evicted from the quotidian reenactment of God’s creative work in which every human being is intended to participate. “To have a servile soul,” as Farley echoes Levinas, “is to be

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203 Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 44.
incapable of being jarred, incapable of being ordered.” Creation did not come into being ex nihilo. Rather, God ordered the chaos that He found at the beginning. Likewise, the chaotic soul is continually ordered and veering back into an oozing state ready to be jarred again. When humans ate from the Tree in the Garden, they became godlike and thus simultaneously restarted and joined in the process of ordering the chaotic. The soul crushed by radical suffering has been so obliterated that it can no longer participate in the ongoing transformation that is Creation. The suffering soul is static—without motion, without language, without emotion, without motions of defense.

In contrast to the annihilated soul, Farley praises the martyrs and tragic heroes who testify in two directions: negatively and positively. First, martyrs and tragic heroes point out the injustice being committed against them in “a world order in which the good are defeated by the wicked or the strong.” Second, they demand vindication by articulating a powerful vision of a world order beyond the one oppressing them. This world order legitimates the martyr’s or hero’s claims to honor and status. For Farley, Levinas provides the example par excellence of the civic martyr who never relinquishes self-respect. This civic martyr is Socrates. As presented in Plato’s Apology, Socrates did not simply disavow the charges leveled against him. He argued that the polis should honor him as a successful athlete and provide him with free meals for the rest of his days. In the face of imminent death, Socrates refused to plead for his life, preferring to negotiate for honors according to the logic of the civic

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205 Here, Farley’s thought takes a different approach to creation than does that of Edward Farley, who juxtaposes Christian creation ex nihilo with Greek repetition and renewal. See Edward Farley, Divine Empathy: A Tragedy of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 138.
206 Such a choice of emphasis extricates Farley’s theology from the problems encountered by the post-Shoah theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Sölle. In necessitating a God who suffers with us, they leave little room in their theology for Jews, who do not believe in Jesus’ redemptive death and resurrection. For Wiesel, for instance, God dies on the gallows at Auschwitz. His suffering is not a sign of solidarity. The image suspends Wiesel’s audience within a catastrophic moment. Farley’s theology honors this moment while attempting to reintegrate the traumatized into society and to restore a sense of life.
207 Apology 36d. On the elite connotations of these meals as commensality at the royal hearth, see C.M. Bowra, “Xenophanes and the Olympic Games,” The American Journal of Philology 59.3 (1938), 257–79, 274.
apparatus in which he was enculturated. The immediate context of civic tragedy and transgression is peeled back by Socrates’ invocation to remind the audience of the basic moral order to which they all adhere. The ingenuity of his self-defense against the charges of corrupting the young citizens of the polis is to recall that he has not corrupted anyone so much as to receive the honor of free meals at the Prytaneum. The civic martyr conjures up the values of the polis when its citizens have forgotten them. In so doing, the civic martyr is the polis’ foremost citizen.

*Where is God? Theodicy and the Tragic Structure of the Creation*

But why must the civic martyr suffer and die? In the world of drama, the playwright has the option of saving her characters with a deus ex machina. The spiritual equivalent of saving particular individuals from the logic of the divine plot need not be a miracle in terms of an extraordinary supernatural sign, as the biblical literature involving the figure of Daniel makes clear. The Danielic literature includes salvation by both human and supernatural means. In Daniel, God literally inscribes the king’s walls with writing that Daniel, who possesses the more acute interpretative skills of the colonized, can read better than the king’s own interpreters. The semiotics of divine will could not be less numinous. However, in an addition to the Book of Daniel, Susanna is saved from execution by secular juridical procedures. Although she must endure the humiliation of being put to trial and condemned to death, God inspires Daniel to convince her community to authorize him to question the only

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208 As Vasilou reminds us, this aspect of Socrates’ remembered character is a deliberate function of the genre of the *Apology*, which is constructed by Plato to present Socrates narrating himself as a civic martyr: “One unique aspect of the Apology as compared with the other early dialogues is that Socrates has been called upon to speak in a positive way about himself and his life. As we have seen, he is required, for example, to say what he believes would be a just punishment for him, not merely to question others about their views. In addition, Socrates is speaking to a large audience. While conditional irony indulges an interlocutor’s belief that he has knowledge, in this context he cannot be sure that his audience holds any given opinion; he must address them *en masse.*” Iakonos Vasilou, “Socrates’ Reverse Irony,” *The Classical Quarterly* 52.1 (2002), 220–30, 226.


two witnesses to the crime, the elders who accused her of adultery after she refused to submit to their licentious desires. Daniel proves their conspiracy, and the elders receive the punishment they sought to inflict on Susanna. The Danielic literature abounds in miracles. Why does not God consistently intervene in this manner? Why does Socrates die of hemlock when his community wrongfully convicts him? Why can God keep a menorah lit for an extraordinary duration but allow a mother to watch her sons die for their faith? Of all the valiant men at Masada, why does only Josephus live in order to serve the Roman emperor Vespasian as a prophet of the Jewish God? At the personal, communal, and political levels, we must conclude that there are times when God allows the innocent to suffer and die.

The “hidden face” of God, particularly in the face of suffering, is a recurring motif in the later books of the Hebrew Bible and the ecclesiastical leaders in the age of composition of the New Testament. Both Job and Jesus question the wisdom of God’s mandate that they sacrifice comfort and risk both their lives and the lives of the ones they love.\(^{211}\) The original ending of Mark leaves its audience in the cathartic moment of mourning the loss of Jesus. Suffering becomes an integral component of creation for Christians, as seen in the statement of second century martyr Ignatius: “And the virginity of Mary and her giving birth was concealed from the ruler of this age, likewise too the death of the Lord, three mysteries of a cry accomplished in the silence of God.”\(^{212}\) This divine silence is a function of the sovereign rule imputed to God. Once God became omnipotent, suffering had to be interpreted as a divinely preordained component of a divinely preordained creation.\(^{213}\)

Since, as Genesis tells us, God deemed each act of his creation good, the entire creation must be good. As a punishment for disobeying divine orders, certain hardships have been placed upon humanity, such as the necessity of toil and painful childbirth, but those conditions most

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\(^{211}\) In Job 19:9–10, Job is stripped of honor and his crown, and then “broken down on every side.” The imagery recalls the brokenness of the temple of Jesus’ body predicted in the Gospels. This similarity is partially behind the depictions of Job as an athlete in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. See J.R. Baskin, “Job as Moral Exemplar in Ambrose,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 35.3 (1981): 222–31; Michael Poliakoff, “Jacob, Job, and Other Wrestlers: Reception of Greek Athletics by Jews and Christians in Antiquity,” *Journal of Sport History* 11.2 (1984), 48–65.

\(^{212}\) *Letter to the Ephesians* 19.1.

\(^{213}\) Farley, *Divine Empathy*, xv.
people would agree cause the most suffering—e.g., genocide, leprosy, social isolation—are not said to originate from the Fall. Thus, creation is good, and suffering is actually a part of the divine order. It is merely that creation has a tragic structure. For Farley, this is theodicy.

Scripture encodes within it the causes of theodicy. Because theodicy is not the result of the personal interventions of God, as Farley has argued, we find in Scripture a theology of vulnerability. I will trace the topos of vulnerability as it unfolded in Scripture historically and then connect the theme with Farley’s thought on the vulnerable avoiding table fellowship with idols. This will take us from Farley’s identification of theodicy as the tragic structure of creation in *Tragic Vision* to her constructions of ways for human beings to experience the divine incarnation of creation as they suffer through its tragic structure.

*The Vulnerability of Faith*

Scripture demonstrates suffering’s hold on humanity and the need for mutual compassion. In the Torah, perhaps in anticipation of Israel’s impending loss of statehood, we find authors who present their state’s divine mandate for the destruction of the memory of Amalek without remorse (Exod 17:14–6; Deut 25:19). Amalek had assailed the Israelites as a nation as they fled Egypt to found a state. The Israelites were still only a nation, a weary band of ex-slaves marauding about the countryside. For Amalek to attack a group without substantial property was sheer bellicosity. In retribution for the Amalekite disregard for ancient theories on what constituted a “just war,” the Israelites were to blot out their memory under heaven when they came to the land on which they would establish their state. Later, in 1 Sam 15:3, we learn that this is not simply a damnatio memoriae of the Amalekite nation but a wholesale purge of even the animals of the Amalekites. Since the Amalekites were no longer a threat at the time they were written into the Torah, we can only presume that recounting this genocide is meant to throw into relief the amazing character of the Jewish survival as a nation during the period of captivity in Egypt and the exodus from Egypt. Theodicy is averted as the

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Amalekites are defeated and cultural protections for the vulnerable are established.

After the exile in Babylon, ruminations on theodicy become more trenchant and less sanguine. Books such as Job, Lamentations, Isaiah, Esther, and Ezekiel all pose the question of why God fails to respond to the suffering of His people. Esther, of course, best exemplifies the sensitivities and anxieties of this new postexilic theology. Haman, the adversary of Jewish courtier Mordecai, is descended from Agag, king of Amalek. Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, is a descendant of Saul, king of Israel. Thus, the author quite consciously recasts the pre-exilic history of 1 Sam 15 in an imagined exilic past to orient postexilic theology. Esther’s scroll exhibits a new awareness of the tenuousness of political power—there is a sense that any political structures created will not discriminate between the Jews and the goyim. When Haman describes to Ahasuerus the perfect honor, envisioning himself in the palmary role, he finds himself leading Mordecai through what he imagined to have been his triumph. Haman hangs on the gallows he has erected for Mordecai. And, despite Esther’s successful commensal negotiations at court, it is impossible to reverse the original edict permitting a pogrom; the king can only issue an edict permitting a pogrom for those who would start a pogrom. The Jews are allowed to fight in self-defense, just as they were to be attacked because their presence had been construed as a threat. Mordecai, of course, has known about the interchangeability of fates all along—this is exactly why he has allowed Esther to undertake the dubious mission of entering the king’s harem. Whereas in the Torah Israel’s

216 The identification of Haman as an Amalek appears to have been accidental in the earliest versions of Esther. Esther 3:1 merely calls Haman an “Agagite.” The Septuagint knows nothing of Haman’s Amalekite ancestry and instead places his familial provenance in Macedonia, an enemy of both Jewish and Persian nations. Later theological interpretation strengthened the connection between Haman and Amalek (Ant. 11.209, Megillah 13a, Pesiqta Rabbati 12, Midrash Esther Rabbah 3.1 and 7.4). See Louis H. Feldman, Studies in Josephus’ Rewritten Bible (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 525. In contemporary Jewish thought, Amalek has become a metaphysical descriptor for anti-Semitism. See Mendel Piekarz, Hasidut Polin bein Shtei Milhamot ha-Olam (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1990), 327.

217 The mechanistic nature of the theodicy in Esther anticipates the theodicies constructed by Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers such as Newton, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, and Hegel. As in Esther, the absence of the name or figure of God for these thinkers mandated the need for a theodicy that worked by de-personal systems rather than by a personal deity.
victory over Amalek is clear and reassuring, Esther presents a vision of theodicy where suffering is averted only by having drawn a lucky lot (pur).

As the Amalekite traditions develop from Exodus to Esther, we learn that life is fragile in all contexts—in exile, in the diaspora, and in one’s own state. Our enemies are not those in power; they are those who would go after the weak instead of the powerful. Theodicy is not the intentional design by the sovereign to refuse to intervene in suffering; it is characterized, with the possible exception of the divine litigator Job, as divine amnesia and absence. While Farley emphasizes the question of why a good God allows the strong to attack the weak, I think her related concern of how a good God permits his beloved children to have table fellowship with idols is even more salient. Just as one can sacrifice oneself for idols rather than the beloved, one can deny one’s associates solidarity in the hopes of rising above them in the hierarchy. In the Amalekite passages and the Book of Esther, the problem of theodicy arises from the weak attacking each other. The hiddenness of God’s face illumines the injustices and unrealized moments of solidarity perpetrated by humans on each other.218

We can find this motif elsewhere in Scripture. Abuse from one’s associates, of course, is precisely the cause of Job’s psychological miseries. When God takes away his opulent lifestyle, his own friends assume that his misfortune is due to sin. Similarly, Jesus must teach people that disability is related neither to the sins of an individual nor to the sins of an individual’s parents. Part of the work of Job and Jesus is to convince their audiences that no one’s sin is responsible for the broken nature of the world. It is merely the work of the good to respond compassionately to heal the parts of creation under duress. Theodicy is the crucible in which the self-sacrificing good are smelted.

A potential danger is that the principle of sacrifice as a good will be misapplied, leading individuals to suffer for the good without achieving transformation of themselves or the world. Desiring to sacrifice oneself for the good, one instead only achieves self-abnegation by listening to false scripts. The auteurs of these false scripts are not voices within the individual. Rather, humans sacrifice themselves for their societies and thus

218 Thus, in one Talmudic source, we discover the descendants of Amalek and Haman converted to Judaism and produced some of its most respected teachers (b. Sanhedrin 96b).
follow social scripts. This is why Levinas eschews theodicy as a totalitarian project that subordinates the cost of human sacrifice to ultimate designs, resulting in “a teleological drama.” Theodicy can be and has been too easily exploited by totalitarian states like the Nazi, Stasi, and Soviet regimes. Indeed, Farley connects the demons at table-fellowship in 1 Corinthians and the command to cut off body parts causing one to sin in the Gospels with the onus placed on certain groups of individuals within a society. Like Origen and other early Christian men who may have literally emasculated themselves in order to serve as faithful “eunuchs of the kingdom,” self-sacrificing individuals sometimes yield their very bodies to false goods, such as preserving an abusive marriage or serving in the military of an illegitimate state.

David Blumenthal, I think, provides a helpful example from the Shoah that illustrates the relational dynamics of positive sacrifice Farley advocates. Positive sacrifice demands self-respect on the part of the would-be sacrificant in the incarnational theology of Farley, because the tragic hero must remind society of the values it in fact upholds. In the Shoah, two-thirds of the rescuers interviewed by one research team, the Oliners, risked their lives to help Holocaust victims in response to a request by the victim or a mutually respected acquaintance. Had these individuals not taken the initiative to secure their own safety, the death toll surely would have been higher. Here, a death is not necessary to create a tragic hero; it is the request for help that summons forth in the rescuer the recognition of the tragic structure of the cosmos, the heroic nature of the victim, and the need for the rescuer to respond in kind. One thinks of the saying of Jesus preserved in Matthew and Luke that the Father will not give snakes to His children asking for bread (Matt 7:10; Luke 11:11).

In order for humans to hold fast to the self-assurance they need to perform extraordinary feats like seeking shelter in Nazi-occupied territory,

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they need such sacred promises that God and creation are intrinsically good. We need to hear that “this too shall pass.” Given the frailty of human beings and their societies, Farley finds that the natural order provides the surest sign that God’s creation abounds in His love. She cites Jesus’ teaching that the lilies of the field persist in order to inspire hope in creation’s saturation with God’s love even through tragedy:

Jesus walks past some wildflowers and insists they are more beautiful than Solomon in his glory. This is how God clothes grass in the field, weeds that live today and tomorrow are thrown in the oven (Matthew 6:28–30): random, irrelevant, useless beauty. They serve no purpose. People pass by every day without noticing or caring. This beauty does not feed them when they are starving or save them when the soldiers come pillaging. But because they are naked to the inflowing energy of the Divine Eros, the flowers are radiant with an intensity of beauty that no human wealth can manufacture. When Jesus says the divine empire is within and all around us, perhaps he is saying that this influx of beauty is constantly available to us, is always raining down on us, purposeless and perfect.224

Within the tragic structure of creation, then, we discover the radiance of divine love. When we find ourselves outside the camp as social or literal lepers and our worldview turns to anomie, we still have the natural order to remind us of the beauty and hope inherent in creation. The chaos of the beginning remains ordered by God, even if it is only apparent in the beauty of the wildflowers. Even amid the nettles and poison ivy, beauty springs up to nourish our senses and offer us hope.

Thérèse of Lisieux

The tragic structure of the universe remains invisible until it takes form in particular instances of human suffering.225 In The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth (2005), Farley introduces Thérèse of Lisieux as a model of the ways in which a martyr or tragic hero

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can pull back the fabric of the illusion of suffering to reveal the essential
good of creation underneath. Thérèse views her death from tuberculosis in
her early twenties not as a hardship but as a blessing. The value of divine
benefaction, to Thérèse, lies in salvation from earthly disappointments
rather than in imagination of heavenly delights.\textsuperscript{226} The historical work of
Steffen Lösel provides further evidence to support Farley’s theological
claims.\textsuperscript{227} According to Thérèse’s sister Céline during the first
ecclesiastical process concerning her benediction, Thérèse had expressed
gratitude at being permitted to die at age 24, the age when men could be
ordained as priests: “The good God allows me to be sick, so that I could
not have gone there and I would have died before I had exercised my
ministry.” Thérèse proves Farley’s point when she confides her vision of
heaven to Céline. Heaven, it seems, will admit the priests and the female
virgins so that “those who have desired it on earth will partake in heaven
of the honors of the priesthood.” Thérèse’s desire is no idle fancy—she
has her sisters cut her a tonsure. Yet, Thérèse is clear that she is going to
heaven not as an angel or priest but a virgin. This is no mystic vision of
the ways in which heaven differs from earth, such as the insistence of
Matthew’s Jesus that in heaven men and women will not be given in
marriage but will be like the angels or the assertion by Paul that we see
heaven only as through a glass darkly. For Thérèse, her vision of heaven,
afforded by her tragic case of one of the common diseases of the
nineteenth century, permits her to throw into relief the way life should
function on earth. Indeed, her cult in the 1920s became one of the cults
associated with the traditional sites of Germanic healing deities.\textsuperscript{228} It was
not, as Vita Sackville-West has suggested, that Thérèse presided over the
“treacly dulcification” of a feminized French Church by doing ordinary
things extraordinarily well, excelling at the Victorian-era Cult of True
Womanhood.\textsuperscript{229} Rather, as Farley has urged us to see, pilgrims to these

\textsuperscript{226} Wendy Farley, \textit{The Wounding and Healing of Desire: Weaving Heaven and Earth}

\textsuperscript{227} Steffen Lösel, “Prayer, Pain, and Priestly Privilege: Claude Langlois’s New

\textsuperscript{228} According to a 1935 report in the \textit{Tyrolean Informer}, interest in a chapel outside
Innsbruck “grew from day to day, as the ever increasing votive and thank you tablets on
the walls [and] the great stream of visitors attested.” See Helena Waddy, “St. Anthony's
Bread: The Modernized Religious Culture of German Catholics in the Early Twentieth
shrines left votives and tablets as thank-offerings indicating she was restoring a sense of life as it should be, that is, joyous in a way that she had not been able to experience. Thérèse gave these more secular believers hope because she had persisted in the face of adversity, knew her body would be corrupted, and yet still believed in the possibility of the restoration of bodily integrity. Though her body was being cut off, her soul remained intact.

Joseph Ratzinger, Roman Catholic theologian and standing pope, anticipates both historian Lösel and theologian Farley in his choice of Thérèse as a paradigm of faith. Like both of them, he redeems Thérèse from the realm of quotidian kitsch to which the historiography of Sackville-West would relegate her. And, like Farley, he centers his scrutiny on her moments of doubt and atheism arising from her perception of theodicy. In his *Introduction to Christianity* (1969), he underscores that Thérèse has been enculturated into the worldview of her religious community, being “so completely molded by the faith of the Church that the invisible world became, not just a part of her everyday life, but that life itself.”

Despite this, she began to put herself in “sinners’ shoes” and contemplate a chasm that lay beneath those shoes and her neatly ordered religious life. Even within the physical and metaphysical cloisters of her religious order, her illness, and her life of sanctity, she was able to have compassion for the more secular doubters by doubting herself. For Ratzinger, this intellectual progress beyond her self-assured and continually reinforced faith exhibited a great spiritual gift to the *perhaps* advocated by Buber. In a post-Enlightenment age, we are no longer able to imitate Mary’s divine “yes;” the transformational individual sees the Enlightenment critique of belief in God and nonetheless says *perhaps*.

Reading Farley and Ratzinger in tandem, we behold Thérèse as a civic martyr who at once bears the burden of witnessing to an ideal civic order (Farley) and yet is allowed to doubt all order (Ratzinger). For Farley, Thérèse uses her illness as a catalyst to push for her vision of female leadership in roles traditionally reserved for men, such as priest, Doctor of the Church, and soldier. For Ratzinger, Thérèse is a perspicacious

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theological intellect who has compassion for those in a post-
Enlightenment world by envisioning herself in “sinners’ shoes” and
identifying her fate with those outside her cloister. At no point in time for
these two theologians does Thérèse spend her time rhapsodizing about the
martyr’s crown she would receive in heaven. When Thérèse theorizes
justice in heaven she is actually promulgating justice on earth. This
meditation appears to have had transformative power for Thérèse since, as
Lösel notes, she stopped competing with priests and started viewing
herself as their co-worker. In other words, in the mind of Thérèse, she no
longer needed to become a priest; she already was one.

Conclusion

Affliction—whether from biological or social oppression—is an
inexorable component of the life of every human being. Suffering is a part
of creation. This means that our participation in creation will entail the
experience of theodicy, suffering beyond our control but within our
capacity to transform. Farley frames this human condition within the
realm of drama. The human drama is not the teleological drama feared by
Levinas but a redemptive tragedy. The parameters of this tragedy summon
the good within individual humans just as the tragic hero or martyr
inspires within another a call to action. What is essential in this
martyrology is not the construction of heaven but the construction of lived
experience “under heaven,” to borrow the scriptural phrase. Farley’s
example of St. Thérèse of Lisieux emerges from the contemporary
theological project to save the nineteenth century saint from her kitschy
historiographers and to prove that St. Thérèse was indeed a theological
intellect worthy of veneration as a Doctor of the Church. Farley focuses on
Thérèse’s desire to inhabit such male roles, as Doctor of the Church had
been an exclusively male prerogative in the lifetime of Thérèse, as part of
the heroic vision for the transformation of this world as a foretaste of the
one to come. While dying a horrific death of tuberculosis, Thérèse resisted
the temptation to fixate on the somatic and instead both elevated herself to
the role of priest and humbled herself in seeing herself as a secular sinner.
Rather than withdrawing inward from the pain, she kept her soul in
communion with her society. And it is Thérèse’s call to communion that is
Farley’s contribution to theology on the incarnation of the divine in
creation.