

## **“The Place of Lament and the ‘Catharsis of the Complaint’ in Response to the Problem of Evil.”**

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### **“Abstract.”**

Traditional solutions to the problem of evil have sought to affirm, without contradiction, that God is all powerful; God is absolutely good; yet evil exists. However, in the light of the excess of suffering witnessed in the twentieth century, such theoretical justifications of innocent suffering are now unpalatable. After Auschwitz, all responses to the problem must address themselves in practical ways to the victims of suffering.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur outlines one such response, called ‘the catharsis of the complaint.’ In it, he aims to harness our ignorance about the origins of evil to help remove the burden of guilt from the victim. Offering the anthropological insight that we experience evil as either ‘blame’ or ‘lament,’ Ricoeur suggests that our suffering may be transformed if we nourish our lament and allow it to develop into a complaint against God. Doing so can help us to separate the reasons for believing in God from the need to explain the origin of evil.

In this research, I define the problem of evil and identify the limitations of traditional theoretical responses to it, both in theology and philosophy. I present Ricoeur’s model of the catharsis of the complaint and the anthropological principles on which it is founded. I compare them with current studies on the psalms of lament and with contemporary ideas about divine suffering. Then I discuss Richard Bauckham’s interpretation of Jesus’ cry of lament, as a point at which Ricoeur’s model might best be integrated with atonement theology and biblical insights on lament. Finally, I discuss the potential application of these combined insights in parish ministry, reflecting on my related experience as a deacon intern.