

Why Pain Exists

“What kind of God would want that kind of pain inflicted on someone?” This is one of the central questions posed in Dan Brown’s bestselling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. It is also the question posed by Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ*. Mr. Brown’s answer is simple: God, whoever he or she might be, does not want the scourging and Cross that Jesus embraces. Thus, Jesus cannot be God.

The idea is logical in a certain sense. It demonstrates an understanding that pain is evil. But it also demonstrates a failure to understand *why* pain is evil, or *how* pain is evil. Mel Gibson understands the answers to these questions, his secular critics, critics who embraced *The Da Vinci Code*, do not. And that, as the poet says, makes all the difference.

While pain is a natural evil, it is morally neutral. A natural evil is something that was not originally part of God’s design for the world. God created everything good. Pain, at least to the extent it is present today, is not part of God’s original design for the world.

Now, there is a difference between natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is a result that man created for himself, it is not what God intends for man. Hurricanes, tornadoes, blindness, plague, physical or mental deformity: these are all natural evils. But wait: if man causes natural evils, and hurricanes are natural evils, am I saying men cause hurricanes? That’s absurd! How can *that* be? Well, we have to understand how the world works.

Where Pain Comes From

First, we have to understand that grace is power. It is the power that keeps the universe running harmoniously. God set mankind up as stewards who care for the world. God sends grace into the world. We are supposed to direct

this grace, this power so as to help all creation bring greater glory to God.

Man has two choices. He can accept the grace God sends new every morning, or he can reject it. If mankind rejects grace, then the world does not have the power needed to work harmoniously. We are all acquainted with machinery that breaks when it is run with insufficient power. The world is exactly that kind of machine. When we choose to reject the power of grace, the world inevitably fractures. Natural evils such as those listed above are some of the fractures.

Moral Good - Natural Good

As stated above, there is a difference between moral good/evil and natural good/evil. Morality refers to the consequences that are visited on persons. A morally good act fills a person with grace. A morally evil act strips grace away from that person. Each person can only affect his own state of grace. I cannot strip grace from you, nor can you strip grace from me. Conversely, I cannot add grace to you, nor can you add grace to me.

A natural good or natural evil refers to a created thing that is not a person. If a created thing is working the way God intended it to work, it is a natural good. If it is not working the way God intended it to work, it is a natural evil. Natural goods and natural evils also have no direct effects on persons. A natural good will not add grace to a person, nor will a natural evil remove grace from a person.

Working Together, or Not

However, when created things work the way they are supposed to, we generally find it easier to act in a morally good way. When created things do not work the way they are supposed to, that is, when we encounter a

natural evil like plague or drought or physical deformity, we tend to find it more difficult to act in a morally good way.

Now, earlier we noted that no human person can add to or injure another person’s state of grace. However, we *can* each add to or strip away the grace in a situation. This is a poor example, but it will have to do: suppose I see you sitting in front of a malfunctioning computer. I fix the computer. I have “graced” that situation, because I have turned a natural evil (your broken computer) into a natural good through the skills that grace has bestowed on me. As a result, your ability to retain the grace you have is much improved.

On the other hand, if you were sitting in front of a working computer and I harmed it or harmed you (perhaps blinding you with acid), I have used the skills given me by grace in order to strip away grace from the natural objects around you. Now you are forced to deal with natural evils, a situation that shouldn’t be the way it is. As a result, you are much less likely to be able to hold onto your own grace. For my part, I have misused the grace within me, and I am now emptied of it. Grace is power precisely because it is the presence of God, and God will not abide in one who does evil.

The Plan

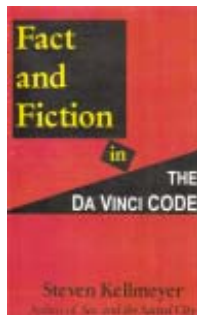
How we respond to the natural goods and evils we meet every day influences how we decide to cooperate with the grace that dwells within us. The idea is this: no matter what comes our way, we will choose to cooperate with the power of grace within us, we will not choose to empty ourselves of it in despair.

Healing the World

When we take something good and grace-filled – the human act of sex, for instance – and intentionally empty it of grace, we simultaneously empty ourselves of grace. But God sends grace new every morning. When we use the grace He sends to fill and thereby heal a situation that lacks grace, the very act can open us up so that God can fill us with even more grace if He chooses.

God is the source of grace. We experience pain because the world is short on grace. If the world is the road to heaven, pain is one of the potholes, a possible impediment to reaching our destination if we hit it with the wrong attitude and/or use it wrong. However, if at the moment we encounter pain, we remain open to the God Who is the source of grace, we become a pipeline. If we cooperate with the grace He places within us, He can use us as instruments to fill the potholes in the road. The world's pain is lessened. Not only do we find ourselves on the road to heaven, but we have also helped make the road smoother for others to follow. Thus, like an athlete training for a marathon, a Christian can say “pain is good” only in reference to the pain he himself endures as part of the work he does with God as God goes about healing the world.

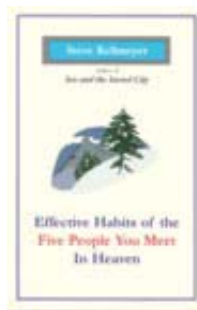
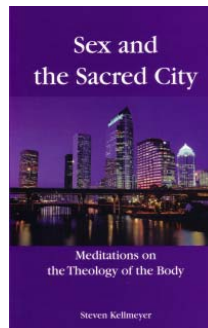
Dan Brown doesn't understand any of this. All he sees is the pain of the Cross. He doesn't understand that one man chose to stand still in the middle of our desert of pain. One man stood tall in the thrashing, fractured world, stood still and absorbed into Himself all the pain the world could deal out, all so that the grace, the power, necessary to heal the world could pour in through Him like water through a pipe, like water to a dry desert, to heal a dying world.



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If the smallest drop of Christ's blood was enough to pay for all sins, past, present, and future, why didn't He stop at the circumcision? Or at the first blow of the scourge? Why the Crucifixion and death?

“It's size, stylistic grace and logic should guarantee this book wide readership. A masterpiece of clarity!” - Al Kresta, President, Ave Maria radio



This companion study guide to Mitch Albom's best-selling novel, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, provides a theological and Scriptural analysis of the book, showing the marvelous resonances he uses to build his incredible story. Each chapter closes with a study guide, to assist you and your small group.

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Mel Gibson's
The Passion of the Christ
versus
Dan Brown's
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