



# An interlocutory engagement on Barth's Shadow Side of Creation and Boyd's Warfare Theodicy as it relates to the origin of natural evil

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## Abstract

Over recent years, renewed interest in the Theology of Karl Barth has emerged among Evangelicals. Barth's Christocentric Theology seems to resonate with Evangelicals, especially with regards to Christ being the full and final revelation of God or Barth's Christocentric theological focus. In this paper, attention will be given to Barth's understanding of the Shadow side of creation in comparison with Gregory Boyd's Warfare theodicy as it relates to natural evil. While there is quite exhaustive scholarly attention given to the Barth's understanding of the Nothingness of evil, which is a modified engagement of St Augustine's Privation of God, and Gregory Boyd's Open theism which in many ways is an antithesis to St. Augustine. This article is the first to bring both Barth and Boyd into dialogue. Barth sees natural disasters in the world as part of God's divine work, thus good, to which he refers to as the Shadow Side of Creation. However, Boyd, who writes from within a broadly Evangelical tradition, sees calamity in nature as the work of the Devil, which he terms Warfare theodicy or Spiritual Warfare. In bringing into dialogue Barth and Boyd, this article will try to ascertain whether both views resonate with the understanding of natural evil within Evangelicalism.

**Keywords:** Evangelicalism, Natural Evil, Theodicy, Shadow Side, Spiritual Warfare  
Creation

## Introduction

Christianity has always been challenged to justify God amid evil and suffering. In this present dispensation, this remains one of the most perplexing problems for Christianity. The rise of Barth's theology and Boyd's Trinitarian Warfare theodicy will be brought into dialogue with their understanding of Natural Evil. Natural evil can be defined as that evil that is brought upon humanity in which human beings have no direct involvement in (Harold, 2013:1). According to Barth (1957:594) evil, sin, wickedness, the Devil, death and non-being does not find its existence outside of the will of God. Barth (1957:503) claimed that nature could not and must not be placed on the same level as God, because to do so, creation would not be distinct from God and therefore not be his creation. Thus, Barth had no problem in seeing natural chaos as part of God divine intention, a good creation, because of his Christocentric focus (Barth, 1958: 366-384). Boyd (2001:430) on the other hand, believes "the scope and intensity of suffering and evil we experience in this world are only adequately accounted for when viewed against the backdrop of a cosmic war between God and Satan. Much evil in the world is the result of the earth being caught up in the crossfire



of this age-long (but not eternal) cosmic battle.” This article will serve as an interlocutor between Barth and Boyd and seeks to see whether these views resonate with Evangelicalism.

## **Evangelicalism**

It is accepted that evangelicalism is a modern area (Field, 1998:13), that has its genesis in the Reformation and the term “evangelical” was synonymous for Protestant. Evangelicalism like most religious movements has never been monochrome and it included Calvinist and Arminians, confessionalist and non-confessionalist, Baptist and paedobaptist. The theological views held by evangelicals is also as varied. However, despite the theological variances that exist within this movement, Bebbington (2005) states that the four distinctive marks of Evangelicalism have remained consistent: conversion, centrality of the cross, activism and the Bible.

The stress on conversion according to Hicks (1998:14) has its roots in the Reformation doctrine of Justification. Salvation is God’s gift and it received by individuals through faith. The cross, as the representation of the sacrifice of Christ is the gift of salvation. The preaching of the cross therefore the supreme means by which souls were turned to Christ. Activism is also a clear distinguishing mark of evangelicalism, a focus not only on local evangelism and pastoral care, but a vision of a world won for Christ (Hicks, 1998:15). The Bible for Evangelicals has always been the supreme constitution for faith and life, theology was therefore rooted in the Bible. However, this led to popular biblicism with a disdain for an intellectual theological pursuit, leading to fundamentalism that gave rise to an unimaginative literalism. However, in his present dispensation evangelicals played a very critical role in the development of biblical scholarship.

These are the core themes within evangelicalism and the limited scope of this article will not allow space for a thorough exploration of these tenants which evangelicals have been using as they preached and lived out their beliefs.

## **Barth’s Shadow Side of Creation**

In discussing creation, Barth introduces the concept of the “shadow side of creation.” Barth (2010:296) describes the “shadow side” as that part of creation that is not light. In creation, he states (2010:296) that there is a positive side and a negative side. There is light, and there is darkness. The darkness, decay, indigence, ashes, and death are included in what Barth calls the “shadow side” of creation. For Barth (2010:296) this shadow side is part of the created order, and it is therefore very good. To Barth, creation is good in that it corresponds perfectly to the design God has in the election of Jesus Christ. The good creation is the perfect order and location for the salvific work of Jesus Christ. This good creation includes a shadow side as part of its perfection.

In distinguishing between the shadow side of creation and nothingness, Barth (2010:296) states that the Shadow side of creation is not part of nothingness, even though humans may perceive the shadow side as a menace. While the shadow side



of the created order is on the “frontier of nothingness,” it is not nothingness. To associate the shadow side of creation with nothingness is a “tenacious” slander on God’s good order and suggesting that the shadow side is nothingness does not merely represent a slander against the whole creation it is also a triumph of nothingness. If one posits that the shadow side of creation is part of nothingness, real nothingness is concealed. For Barth (2010:300) this concealment of nothingness prevents one from coming to terms with real nothingness. When nothingness can be hidden in the shadow side of creation, it becomes confused with a good. Nothingness becomes “something which is ultimately innocuous and even salutary.” This confusion Barth argues (2010: 301), is tantamount to an insult to the Creator.

The conflation of the shadow side and nothingness has another unfortunate result: nothingness is now seen as something to be attributed to God. Barth (2010:301) further argues, if the shadow side is nothingness, then not only is creation now suspect, but the Creator is also suspect. The Creator is now responsible for nothingness. Nothingness is now hidden. The real menace of nothingness appears harmless and tolerable. Barth (2010:297), however, states that the created order is what God intended it to be from the beginning. Even though the shadow side of creation, may strike humans unevenly and with questionable justice, creation praises the Creator. Pointedly, even the shadow side praises the Creator.

The shadow side of creation includes natural disasters. As much as natural disasters are brought about by the laws of nature, they are part of the created order and are good. Barth (2010:161) does not believe that God is remote from the earth, neither is God uninvolved with His creation. God is capable of miraculous involvements with nature, but that is not the usual way God operates. God is the God of order. The order of the world is that natural disasters occur. While God may intervene, constant intervention to prevent nature from running its course would be a complete suspension of natural law tantamount to a lawless creation.

For Barth, the shadow side of creation is not accidental. Both the light and the darkness are necessary for creation to exist. Creation cannot exist without decay and death due to its limited and non-divine status. Creation emerges from the wholly good God, and whatever is natural in creation is therefore completely good. For Barth, confusing the shadow side with nothingness is a dreadful mistake that must be avoided because it could lead one to believe that there is a “dark” or “demonic” side to God.

Further, it is a mistake that must be disconnected from Christian thinking. The shadow side is not nothingness and should never be accused of being as such because seeing it as such prevents one from seeing real evil. Barth wants to prevent confusion regarding the nature of evil to preserve the ability to recognise evil for what it is. The problem for Barth here is that the content of the creation narrative and the promise of the new creation argue against his position. Since Barth views the creation narrative as a “saga,”<sup>1</sup> he is not binding himself to a strictly literal reading of the narrative. Barth

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<sup>1</sup>For Barth, a saga is “. . . an intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of time and space. Legend and anecdote are to be regarded as a degenerative form of saga; legend as the depiction in the saga from a concrete individual personality; and anecdote as the sudden illumination in saga form either of a personality of this kind or of a concretely historical



therefore maintains an ability to look at the text differently than what is directly presented. Church tradition and the Scriptures, however, argue that death is not normative in the original creation. Death is a result of sin. In Barth's logic, however, death is a part of creation and therefore good. Barth will simply not allow that death and suffering are natural evil. More than that, in his doctrine of nothingness, Barth does not reflect on the destructive nature of the fall on the created order because Barth sees death and destruction as always been with humans as the shadow side of creation.

### **Boyd's Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy (TWT)**

Boyd (2001) argues that the Trinitarian warfare motif is to be found in Scripture. By "Trinitarian," Boyd (2001) maintains it is because it holds that God is the triune Creator from whom all other beings and things originated. It is a "warfare" worldview because it also includes a belief that there are good and bad agents who are significantly involved in our world. Thus, TWT is the understanding that "the scope and intensity of suffering and evil we experience in this world are only adequately accounted for when viewed against the backdrop of cosmic war between God and Satan.

In this section, space is dedicated to articulating how Boyd derives his Warfare Theodicy. Boyd (2001) argues that the Hebrews seized the ANE war motif and incorporated into their inspired tradition, but with the trappings omitted. By seeing this idea as the basis of the Old Testament (OT), Boyd makes five conclusions concerning the warfare motif within, four of which are directly significant for our purposes.

First, God is sovereign, but he battles cosmic forces that threaten the foundations of creation. Boyd (2001) sees this most clearly articulated within the creation narratives. His understanding of creation is based not only on Genesis 1 but on the multitude of references to this event throughout the OT. When approached in this manner, he believes, we will come to an understanding of creation that is highly influenced by a warfare worldview. The OT authors recognised that an authentic battle took place when God created the world, and they affirm that it is still taking place as He preserves the world from chaos. Therefore, we must understand that the references to Yamm (the sea), Rahab, Leviathan, et al. in the Bible are not mere metaphors, for these 'beings' are alive and well. This battle between God and evil first observed in the creation accounts endures, but it has now spilt into human history due to the rebellion of humanity. The conflict between God and these rebellious forces is so authentic that the OT authors present within their writings the successful resistance and defeat of God's will on numerous occasions.

Boyd's (2001) second conclusion from the OT pertains to the significant amount of attention given to the existence of "gods" who form a council of God and collectively constitute his army. God alone is Creator and supreme, but other gods exist; what he terms creational monotheism. Creational monotheism allows for the presence of other gods but affirms that they are in existence because God has made them. These gods have a significant amount of authority to oversee the welfare of various aspects of

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situation. If the concept of myth proves inadequate—as is still to be shown—it is obvious that the only concept to describe the biblical history of creation is that of saga." See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics Study Edition*



creation or nations, and there is an intimate involvement between earthly and heavenly battles. Like humans, these gods are in a position to carry out God's will, but if they choose, they may also temporarily thwart God's will.

Boyd's (2001) third conclusion from the OT is that Satan is a relatively minor character. God must contend with a sometimes disobedient and incompetent council of spiritual beings, and with one particularly malicious God named "the adversary." The OT does not have a thorough outworking of Satan and demons, for they are of periphery interest in its cultural context. This underdeveloped demonology becomes the foundation for seeing evil as originating in the heart of free creatures - human and spiritual. Evil is thus perceived as an intrusion into the good.

Boyd's last conclusion is that Job is the only place where the problem of evil is explicitly addressed in the OT. This story demonstrates that Job's suffering was not a result of his sin, nor was it the result of God's divine plan. Evil exists in the heart of humanity and the hidden world between humans and God. God can use evil spirits to a good end by the divine will (but only after the action), yet what we usually find, as in the case of Job, is that God and evil spirits are in real conflict with each other. The cosmos is a divinely governed democracy, not a divine dictatorship.

Though the warfare motif occurs throughout the OT, we must recognise that it occurs there in only seminal form when compared to the New Testament (NT). The NT builds upon the foundation of the OT's Warfare Worldview: its understanding of a "world in between," the acknowledgement of genuine conflict in this "world," and a realisation that this spiritual conflict impacts human history. Moving into the NT, Boyd argues (2001) that, "the central conviction decisively colours almost everything that Jesus and the early church were about that the world is caught in the crossfire of a cosmic battle between the Lord and his angelic army and Satan and his demonic army."

In Boyd's (2001) view, Jesus viewed his mission and the Kingdom of God through a warfare motif. Jesus' actions of healing, exorcism and his control of nature were acts of war against Satan whom Jesus affirms as the ruler of this world. In Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, we see his desire to destroy the kingdom of Satan. The meaning of Jesus' ministry is found here: the anticipated defeat of Satan's kingdom, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in its place. Boyd believes that a failure to see Jesus and the Kingdom of God in this way is the result of the strength of the "post-Augustinian, classical-philosophical theistic tradition as well as Western Enlightenment presuppositions" and it leads to the problem of evil.

Jesus' actions and his teachings were acts of war; with the first being primary. Boyd sees two exorcisms (the man at Geza - Mark 5:1-27; the demonised boy - Mark 9:14-30) and two miracles (the calming of the raging sea - Mark 9:36-41; the barren fig tree - Mark 11:12-14) as representative of Jesus' ministry of warfare, and they give us insights into the type of world in which we live. Boyd has much to say concerning these four stories, but we will highlight only his significant points. Concerning the man at Geza, Boyd (2001) sees Legion as a significant part of Satan's army in that region, which highlights the somewhat territorial nature of demons. He also notes that Jesus was unable to exorcise Legion upon first bidding, for Legion requested to be sent into the swine after Christ's command. These elements point to the power of resistance, even against God, that demons possess, and it highlights their restless nature. The



second story of demonisation (the demonised boy) shows us that demons can possess or oppress even those who are unwilling.

Satan can impose his will on a person, making them victims as opposed to willing participants. In the miracles of nature (calming the sea and the barren fig tree) Boyd sees the presence of demonic power. Both stories show us that Jesus needed to battle nature due to the presence of demonic forces that had sent them awry. In the above four accounts, we must note that Jesus did not see any divine purpose behind these events, and he did not attribute them to God's work. Satan is behind them all; he is Jesus' enemy. Satan is an independent agent who is the enemy of God, warring against Him at every turn.

The ultimate act of war in Jesus' life was the incarnation, his first victory was the cross, and the ultimate victory is eschatological. The cosmic understanding of evil and the Warfare Worldview of the Bible broadens our understanding of the cross. We are to understand that our salvation is rooted in the cross as the defeat of Satan; it is first a cosmic event and second an anthropological event. Thus, the cross and Christ's resurrection were not primarily about us; they were about overcoming evil in creation and all areas of life.

The NT writers, according to Boyd (2001), saw the Christian life in the same terms as Jesus saw his ministry - as a form of warfare. Paul understood that there was a hierarchy of demonic powers whose head is Satan, but this is not merely structural, it is highly personal. As primary deceiver and destroyer, Satan is the chief influence behind all sin in his opposition to the believer.

This conflict, however, is not an eternal one. For one glorious day, though many battles will have been won and lost, God will ultimately win the war. The result of this victory will be the damnation of Satan and his angelic forces for whom hell was created. The ultimate victory will be God's, and it will be applied first to the cosmos and secondly to us.

In his book, *God at War* (2001) Boyd develops a view of spiritual warfare. In this work, Boyd concludes that history is a picture of a war propelled by an on-going spiritual battle between God and his/her angels and Satan and his angels. Satan, according to Boyd (2001:206), is the source of all-natural evil. Blaming Satan for natural evils such as death, diseases, congenital disabilities, mental illness, storms, and earthquakes enables Boyd to encompass all forms of evil in his synthesis warfare theodicy. Every instance of evil originates in the choice of the creature that was given freedom for the sake of love. Boyd (2001:129) elaborates:

When one possesses a vital awareness that in between God and humanity there exists a vast society of spiritual beings who are quite like humans in possessing intelligence and free will, there is simply no difficulty in reconciling the reality of evil with the goodness of the supreme God.

Boyd declares that God created a good and non-defective creation and that God does not will the destruction and terror that comes upon humanity through evil. Boyd (2001:182-183) asserts that Satan invades and disturbs God's good creation and uses it as a weapon to cause harm and spread destruction. Thus, Satan aims to destroy



God's work by recruiting human beings into his service. In Boyd's view, the understanding of spiritual warfare is another advantage for the development of an adequate theodicy. For Boyd, the power of Satan prevents God from merely controlling evil and makes it necessary for God to war against him. Thus, God's power to deal with the opposing forces of the Devil is limited.

Another aspect that is worthy of investigation is Boyd's understanding of metaphysical dualism. Boyd (2001:424) defines metaphysical dualism as the conflict between good and evil that is a metaphysical necessity. However, Boyd (2001:424) declares that his spiritual warfare theodicy mediates between metaphysical dualism and metaphysical monism (only good in the ultimate reality) by maintaining that the conflict between good and evil is real, but not a metaphysical necessary and thus not eternal. So according to Boyd (2001:421), God's power is limited in dealing with evil because of shared power given to participating agents (also Satan) in bringing out the purposes of God. I define Satan as follows: A created, but superhuman, personal, evil, world-power, represented in Scripture as the adversary both of God and humanity. However, I posit that there is no war between God and Satan... no cosmic battle. Boyd's metaphysical dualism is unattainable because of who God is. Conway (2000: 74) defines God in a way, which is also accepted within evangelicalism: [God is] the Being who possesses the following attributes: immutability, immateriality, omnipotence, omniscience, oneness or indivisibility, perfect goodness and necessary existence. A plausible argument against dualism comes from Lewis (1958:33-34):

Now, what do we mean when we call one of them the Good Power and the other the Bad Power? Either we are merely saying that we happen to prefer the one to the other or else we are saying that, whatever the two powers think about it, one of them is actually wrong, actually mistaken, in regarding itself as good. Now if we mean merely that we happen to prefer the first, then we must give up talking about good and evil at all. For good means what you ought to prefer quite regardless of what you happen to like at any given moment. If "being good" meant merely joining the side you happened to fancy, for no real reason, then good would not deserve to be called good. So we must mean that one of the two powers is actually wrong and the other actually right. But the moment you say that you are putting into the universe a third thing in addition to the two Powers: some law or standard or rule of good which one of the powers conforms to and the other fails to conform to. But since the two powers are judged by this standard, then this standard, or the Being who made this standard, is farther back and higher up than either of them, and He will be the real God. In fact, what we meant by calling them good and bad turns out to be that one of them is in right relation to the real ultimate God and the other in a wrong relation to Him

This very meaning of good and evil implies the nonsensical nature of any explanation of reality that says God and the Devil have to coexist equally. This is the reason for Boyd as to why God cannot overcome evil in the present reality. Because if Satan influences human being to make poor moral decisions that causes pain and suffering God cannot intervene because of the free choice he/she had given to humanity. This understanding of metaphysical dualism is untenable because of the meaning God is omnipotent. Metaphysical dualism undermines the omnipotence of God (Harold, 2013). This is the case because any doctrine that implies Satan must exist in equal



power to God also implies that God is not omnipotent. The following argument explicates this point:

- If God is omnipotent, then God possesses the power to destroy (if he/she freely chooses) any, and every, being.
- If God possesses the power to destroy (if he/she freely chooses) any, and every, being, then no being (except God) is an all-powerful being'
- If Satan is not all powerful, then metaphysical dualism is false.

As Schaeffer (1990: 186) emphasised Christianity is a creation-centred system. It begins with the fact that there is a Creator God who has existed forever. God has created all things, so there is nothing autonomous from God. While I do acknowledge that Satan tries all attempts to mess up the plan of God, Satan does not and will not succeed. However, divine revelation (1 Jn. 4:4) explicitly states, “. . . He who is in you is greater than He who is in the world” There is no shared power but rather “allowed power”. Guthrie (1981:150) provides an excellent summary statement:

There is a general belief that although the *kosmos* is God's world, it is under the influence of evil to such an extent that the word itself can be used of mankind at enmity with God. An impression of dualism is unavoidably created by this means, but it is never a metaphysical dualism, only an ethical. . . .There is also general agreement that spiritual agencies have a powerful influence. . . .There are constant evidences of the clash between God and Satan, but never any doubt about the ultimate issue. What is adumbrated in other NT books comes to expression in the ultimate overthrow of Satan in the book of Revelation.

Boyd, in articulating his position on the function of Satan while claiming to have a mediated position, does not define the position clearly. He describes it as at the end God will triumph over Satan. In view of Boyd's open theism, he seems to contradict himself. If God does not know the future because the future is not a reality, this victory cannot be assured, this positions Boyd closer to metaphysical dualism than he wants to admit.

While I do not dispute the activity of Satan and the activity of powerful evil spirits, what Boyd presents in his cosmic war perspective is a form of dualism. To understand God's power in light of the activities of the "demonic" forces that are formidable and running the cosmos is no easy matter, even for God is to limit the Divine. However, is the power of the Devil the same as the power of God? I would argue that it is not, for the strength of the creature has nothing to do with the issue.

## Conclusion

God created a good world that is ordered and purposeful (Nelson, 2007: 288). The feature of this particular world, was the population of certain creatures that possessed will that might either be used for good or evil. Creatures who possessed this free will are angels and humans who used their free will to rebel against God. The entrance



of sin into this world brought about deleterious effects upon all of creation (Rom. 8:20). The reality of such evil however, does not delimit the divine power of divine goodness.

At this point, Barth's understanding of creation differs from much of the Evangelical Tradition Christian tradition and has generally been seen as natural evil what Barth would call the shadow side as the evil that has befallen creation. Most early church fathers, including Augustine, would see evil in the world as having its origins in the fall, thus arguing from the biblical narrative that the created order was different before the fall of humanity. (Oden, 1992; Erickson, 1998; Frame, 2002; Nelson, 2007). It was the fall and the resulting curse that reduced the created order to futility. The resulting cosmos is therefore very different than the one that God created in the beginning.

If there is a fall that affects creation, as Scriptures affirm, then the world, necessarily, as it is currently, is not the world it was designed to be. The Scriptures also point from the current world to one that will be renewed. The Revelation speaks of a "new heaven and a new earth." The new heaven and earth are different from the current order of creation. The Revelation describes the new creation as lacking disease, pain, sorrow, and death. These are part of the world now passing away. They are in no sense considered a good that will be replaced, but rather an evil that will be eliminated. The Scriptures do not speak of death as a natural part of God's good creation, but as the "last enemy to be destroyed" (1 Cor. 15:26 NRSV).

Rather than allow that the whole of the created order is broken by the fall, as in much of Christian theology, Therefore, it can be concluded that Barth (2010) defends the created order, as it currently exists, as the will of God, while Barth can appropriately characterise as a realm of falsehood that becomes evil when it encroaches on the realm of creation. Therefore, it could be understood that Barth's sees, all the personifications of evil in Scripture are mythological expressions of this cosmic menacing. This position is outside the mainstream Evangelical Christian thought because it leaves Barth appearing callous toward the suffering brought on by what is frequently called natural evil. If what is called natural evil is a normal and good part of the created order.

I also conclude that Boyd also departs from the Evangelical understanding concerning his cosmic war theory which brings God in perpetual duality with Satan. Thus, making Boyd a neo-Deist in his understanding of creation. However, while he brings to the reality the existence and the personality of the Devil, this would be constant with Evangelical belief. The conclusion that can be drawn from Boyd, is that Natural evil is the direct result of Satan's rebellion against God before the fall of man.

While both Barth and Boyd have made an incredible contribution to the theodicy debate, both views are not consonant with Evangelical beliefs about God and Natural evil within Evangelicalism. Evangelicals believe that God created a perfect world and it was the original sin of human beings in the Garden of Eden that is the cause of Natural evil in this world.

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