

Narrative, Liturgy, and the Hiddenness of God[†]

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Next to the problem of evil, the most important objection to belief in God is the problem of divine hiddenness.¹ This latter problem starts from the supposition that God exists—after all, God is *hidden* only if God exists—and then reduces that supposition to absurdity by pointing out that *if* God exists, then the following mutually inconsistent claims are true:

- P1. God has allowed himself to remain hidden from many people.
- P2. It would be bad for an omnipotent, omniscient God to remain hidden from anyone.
- P3. God, being perfectly good, cannot do anything that is bad.

In defense of the first premise, something like the following two (alleged) facts are standardly cited:

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¹ There is dispute in the literature over whether there is a problem of divine hiddenness that is genuinely separate from the problem of evil. Peter van Inwagen, for example, argues that there is, whereas Jon Kvanvig argues that there is not. (Cf. van Inwagen, “What is the Problem of the Hiddenness of God?”, pp. 24 – 32 in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. by Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], and Kvanvig, “Divine Hiddenness: What is the Problem?”, pp. 149 – 163 in the same volume. See also the last chapter of van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006].)

INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE: For many people, the available a priori and empirical evidence in support of God's existence is inconclusive: one can be fully aware of it and at the same time rationally believe that God does not exist.

ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: Many people—believers and unbelievers alike—have never had an experience that seems to them to be a direct experience or awareness of the love or presence of God; and those who do have such experiences have them rarely.

Obviously not everyone will agree that these two claims are true. At the same time, many atheists and agnostics, and some theists, would insist that they are not only true, but understated. For purposes here I'll grant that they are true and I won't explore the question of whether stronger versions might be defensible as well. *Plausibly* strengthened versions of these claims—e.g., that the evidence for *most* people or even for *all* people is inconclusive *at best*—wouldn't affect the main argument of this paper. But using them here would make it more difficult to motivate the problem, it would make it harder to get away with simply granting that they are true, and it would open me up to the charge of attacking an unsophisticated target.

One might wonder whether the obtaining of INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE really implies that God is *hidden*. I'll take up this question in the next section. But, obviously enough, nothing of great substance hangs on this matter either. The proponent of the hiddenness argument might simply replace talk about divine hiddenness with talk about the obtaining of INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. The new argument would then proceed with much the same force as the original.

Let us for the moment concede that INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE together imply that God is hidden. What now of the second premise? The basic problem with divine hiding is that it seems inconsistent with the following thesis:

DIVINE CONCERN God strongly desires to promote the well-being of all of his
rational creatures, both now and in the afterlife.

The reason is straightforward. All of the major theistic religions agree that belief in God is vital for our present and future well-being. But a world in which God is hidden is one in which God is doing far less than he could (if he is omnipotent and omniscient) to promote rational theistic belief. Hence, it is one in which God is doing far less than he could to promote our well-being. Moreover, divine hiddenness is a source of suffering in believers, who often feel abandoned, neglected, unloved, or rejected by the being to whom they have devoted their lives and whom they have been taught to regard as their loving heavenly Father.

Of course, it is conceivable that God have a good reason for remaining hidden. Suppose, for example, that divine hiddenness promotes some greater good for humanity that God rightly desires more than he desires the well-being of the individuals from whom he is hidden. Or suppose that, contrary to initial appearances, for every individual S from whom God is hidden, God's hiddenness from S promotes S's well-being. Then the apparent conflict with DIVINE CONCERN disappears. So the *problem* of divine hiddenness remains only if we suppose that divine hiddenness does not promote any good the promotion of which would justify God in permitting whatever bad things come from divine hiddenness. In simpler terms: The problem remains only if we suppose that divine hiddenness does not promote any 'God-justifying good'.

Not surprisingly, once we set aside attempts to deny P1, the bulk of the remaining literature on divine hiddenness is aimed at identifying possible God-justifying goods.² The presumption in this literature seems to be that the only viable candidates are *human* goods (e.g., freedom, the cultivation of certain kinds of virtue or prevention of certain kinds of vice, etc.).³ Though various other considerations might just as easily motivate the presumption, at least one powerful motivation is the fact that it is a logical consequence of the following general principle endorsed by various prominent writers on the problem of evil:

BENEFIT TO THE SUFFERER: God is justified in allowing undeserved suffering to come to an individual X for the sake of greater goods only if among those greater goods are goods that benefit X.⁴

If BENEFIT TO THE SUFFERER is true, then it looks like human goods *have* to be included among the goods (if any) that justify God in allowing INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE to obtain.

² For a variety of such responses, see the essays in Howard-Snyder and Moser, eds., *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*—in particular, Michael Murray, “Deus Absconditus”; Laura L. Garcia, “St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness”; William Wainwright, “Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God”; and Paul Moser, “Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding.” See also Paul Moser, *The Elusive God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Note too that one might *posit* God-justifying goods without attempting to identify them. In the works of his just cited, Paul Moser identifies various God-justifying goods that might result from divine hiddenness, but he also denies that the goods he identifies explain every case in which God is hidden from someone. Nevertheless, his view seems to be that every case in which God is hidden someone is justified by some good that God aims to promote. (See especially “Cognitive Idolatry,” p. 135.)

³ I assume that the prevention of evils equally bad or worse is a good. So, in other words, if it turns out that God permits ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE and INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE to obtain simply because preventing them would result in human evils as bad as or worse than the suffering they cause, then, by my lights, the point of divine hiddenness is still to promote human goods. This is a terminological point, not a substantive one.

⁴ See, e.g., Eleonore Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 393 - 423, and “Providence and the Problem of Evil,” pp. 51 - 91 in *Christian Philosophy*, edited by Thomas P. Flint (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990. For critical discussion of this principle, along with references to other philosophers who endorse it, see Jeff Jordan, “Divine Love and Human Suffering,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 56 (2004): 169 – 78. I think that a suitably qualified version of BENEFIT TO THE SUFFERER is plausible when the suggestion in view is that God might be allowing someone to suffer for the sake of *human* (or other creaturely) goods; but the unqualified principle here seems to me to have counterexamples (along the lines discussed in section 2 below).

In the present paper, however, I want to defend a rather different line. In particular, I want to defend a response to the problem of divine hiddenness that is consistent with the following claim:

NO HUMAN GOOD: It is not the case that God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE in order to secure human goods.

NO HUMAN GOOD is consistent with the claim that God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE in order to secure *greater goods*. It is also consistent with the claim that the obtaining of INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE in fact promote *human goods* (that may or may not count as ‘greater’, God-justifying goods). What it rules out is the idea that whatever human goods may be promoted by divine hiddenness are the goods *for the sake of which* God remains hidden.

Drawing in part on recent work by Eleonore Stump and Sarah Coakley, I shall argue that even if NO HUMAN GOOD is true, divine hiddenness does not cast doubt on DIVINE CONCERN. My argument will turn on three central claims: (a) that ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE and INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE are better thought of as constituting divine *silence* rather than divine *hiddenness*, (b) that even if NO HUMAN GOOD is true, divine silence is compatible with DIVINE CONCERN so long as God has provided a way for rational creatures to find him and to experience his presence despite the silence, and (c) that there is some reason to think that Biblical narratives and liturgical acts are vehicles by which we might find and experience the presence of God. Each of these claims will be defended, in turn, in the three sections that follow.

I. Divine Hiddenness and Divine Silence

Consider the following bi-conditional:

H1: God is hidden \leftrightarrow God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE to obtain

I don't think that H1 has been explicitly affirmed by anyone writing on the problem of divine hiddenness. But it seems to be largely taken for granted in the literature.⁵ My goal in this section is to provide reasons for rejecting H1. In doing so, I don't take myself necessarily to be arguing against widely held views about the nature of hiddenness. Rather, I take myself simply to be providing reasons to reject a widely accepted terminological convention. Still, I think that the argument of this section matters; for our terminology colors the way in which we think about the problem at hand. If God *hides* from his creatures, then it seems he ought to have a good reason for doing so—a reason that somehow involves their good and not just his own personal preferences. But if God is merely *silent*, then it is not at all clear that he needs to have any human-oriented reason for doing so. At any rate, so I will argue later on.

The problem with H1 is just this: It is equivalent to the conjunction of two conditionals, one true and the other false. The true conditional is the left-to-right one:

H1a: God is hidden \rightarrow God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS
EXPERIENCE to obtain

If INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE were false, then there would be empirical or a priori evidence for the existence of God in light of which atheism would be irrational. In that event, we would want to say that God is not hidden, but manifest in the empirical or a priori evidence. Likewise, if ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE were false, then God would be manifest to most people by

⁵ At any rate, this is so on the assumption that God's providing *strong* evidence of his existence would imply the falsity of either ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE or INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE. See especially J. L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 4 – 6 and 83 – 84. Many writers follow Schellenberg's lead in formulating the problem of divine hiddenness, and so are plausibly taken as endorsing roughly the same views about what divine hiddenness consists in.

way of private, subjective experience. Perhaps God would be hidden from *some*; but it wouldn't make sense to say that God is hidden *simpliciter*. Thus, God is hidden *only if* God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE to obtain.

But now consider the other conditional involved in H1:

H1b: God permits INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE & ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE to
 obtain → God is hidden

This one is open to a rather obvious objection. Suppose there's an object—a car, perhaps—that is in plain sight in Wilma's driveway but which Wilma can't see because her eyes are closed. The car isn't hidden from her; she's just not looking. Indeed, even if someone had put the car in her driveway knowing that she wouldn't be looking, we wouldn't want to say that the person had *hidden* the car from her. Now suppose there's something analogous to 'opening our eyes' that we all can do that would allow us to receive experiences or other evidence of the presence of God. And suppose that, as it happens, most of us haven't opened our eyes in this analogous sense.⁶ In that event, INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE might well be true, and true by divine permission; but there seems to be no reason (yet) to say that God is hidden.

Admittedly, more information might change the verdict. Suppose Fred knows that the one place in the world that Wilma can't bear to look is her own driveway—she *always* closes her eyes when she approaches it. Suppose further that Fred has put the car there in a deliberate attempt to conceal it from her. In that case, the car *is* hidden—hidden in plain sight, as it were. What matters here is the *intention* to conceal. Likewise, if we think that ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS

⁶ The idea that something like "failure to open our eyes" explains why God's existence is not more obvious is present in many writers. (See, for example, Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God," and Moser, *The Elusive God*, esp. Ch. 2.) But I think that if this sort of story is really correct, then it is incorrect to say that God is hidden unless the story is fleshed out along the lines suggested in the next paragraph.

EXPERIENCE is due to some deliberate intention on God's part to conceal himself, then (given INCONCLUSIVE EVDIENCE) we have reason to say that God is hidden. Or maybe there is some other bit of information that we could acquire that would lead us to say that God is hidden. My point here is simply that the obtaining of INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE by divine permission is not enough.⁷

The term I would prefer to use in characterizing what we seem to know about God's self-disclosure to the bulk of humanity is, therefore, not *hiddenness* but rather *silence*. To say that something is hidden implies either that it has been deliberately concealed or that it has been concealed (deliberately or not) to such a degree that those from whom it is hidden can't reasonably be expected to find it.⁸ This is why divine hiddenness would seem to require justification. If God cares about our well-being, one would think that, absent special reasons for doing otherwise, he would put us in circumstances such that we could reasonably be expected eventually to find him. But INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE don't imply that God is deliberately concealing his existence from us; nor do they imply, on their own, that we can't reasonably be expected eventually to find him. What they do imply is that God hasn't made a special effort to ensure that most of his rational creatures detect (as such) whatever signs of his existence there might be or whatever messages he might be sending us.

I don't mean to suggest that talk of divine hiding is categorically inappropriate. Indeed, various Biblical writers talk explicitly of God hiding his face and concealing his presence, and

⁷ I assume here that divine omniscience and omnipotence do not obliterate the distinction between what God deliberately brings about and what God merely permits. The assumption isn't problem-free; but it is standard nonetheless. Dispensing with it would push us toward the view that every event is a divine act, and so it would require substantial reframing of the present discussion in terms of whatever distinctions we would then use to separate *purely* divine acts from those divine acts that also count as natural events and acts of non-divine creatures.

⁸ Note too that hiddenness comes in degrees. Word search puzzles and Easter egg hunts, for example, are typically constructed so that the hidden items can reasonably be expected to be found *after a certain amount and kind of effort*. In cases like this, I think that we'd want to say not that they items are entirely hidden, but that they are merely partially hidden. Items that could be found only by sheer luck or extraordinary (unexpected) skill are the ones that count as completely hidden.

Isaiah exclaims outright, “Surely you are a God who hides himself!”⁹ But in all of these cases the suggestion is not that God has so obscured his presence that, for the most part, people cannot reasonably be expected eventually to find him. Rather, the suggestion is simply that God has made his presence less obvious, so that seeking is required in order to find him. In other words, the suggestion is that God is, at most, *partially* hidden, not that he is hidden *simpliciter*.

I also don’t mean to suggest that INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE imply that God is *totally silent*. Both are compatible with God’s having delivered special revelations to select people—for example, the authors of scripture, the prophets, witnesses to the miracles of Jesus, and so on. Nor do I mean to suggest that God isn’t, even now, sending ‘messages’ to all of his rational creatures that could be accessed if only we would do something analogous to ‘opening our eyes’. The point, again, is just that God is evidently not making any special effort to *ensure* that *most of us* receive communicative content from him. A man who chooses to whisper rather than shout instructions to his children, knowing all the while that they cannot (yet) hear him over the racket they are making, is being silent toward his children in the sense that I have in mind. Given INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, it seems that we can safely conclude that, in just the same sense, God (if he exists) is being silent toward most of us.

Henceforth, when I speak of *divine silence* I will be speaking simply of the fact that INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE both obtain. As I understand it, then, divine silence is compatible with God’s having provided some widely and readily

⁹ Is. 45:15. See also, e.g., Ps. 10:1, where the psalmist asks, “Why, O LORD do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” and Job 13:24, where Job asks, “Why do you hide your face, and count me as your enemy?” (Job 13:24) Translations are from the New Revised Standard Version, Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

accessible way for his creatures to find him and to experience his presence, albeit indirectly, despite his silence.

II. Divine Silence and Divine Concern

The question, now, is whether divine silence casts any doubt upon DIVINE CONCERN, given NO HUMAN GOOD. In other words: Assuming divine silence doesn't contribute to our well-being or to any greater human good, does the fact of divine silence give us any reason to doubt that God cares about us.

It is easy to see why one might think that it does. Consider, for example, this excerpt from the private writings of Mother Teresa:

Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me? The child of your love—and now become as the most hated one—the one You have thrown away as unwanted—unloved. I call, I cling, I want—and there is no One to answer—no One on Whom I can cling—no, No One.—Alone. The darkness is so dark...The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable.—Where is my faith?—even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness & darkness.—My God—how painful is this unknown pain. It pains without ceasing....I am told God loves me—and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. ... The whole time smiling—Sisters & people pass such remarks.—They think my faith, trust & love are filling my very being & that the intimacy with God and union to His will must be absorbing my heart.—Could they but know—and how my cheerfulness is the cloak

by which I cover the emptiness & misery.—What are You doing My God to one so small?¹⁰

Mother Teresa devoted the bulk of her life to the service of God and, if we can believe her own assessments of her own inner life, loved and longed for union with God throughout her life in a way that was deeper, more fervent, and more authentic than most of the rest of us even aspire toward, much less attain. Yet here, toward the end of her life, she is driven to absolute despair and misery by persistent silence on the part of God. And this experience of hers is hardly unique: many religious believers experience, to varying degrees, precisely the same sort of misery and despair, the same feelings of abandonment and isolation, and the same heart-rending cosmic loneliness in the face of what they take to be unrelenting silence on the part of the God they serve and worship. What loving father would treat his children so? How could a compassionate God refrain from answering the cries of Mother Teresa and others like her? Wouldn't any *human* parent—flawed and selfish as we are—find it irresistible to draw near to his child and whisper words of comfort and affection? Shouldn't we expect *at least* as much from a being whose love is supposed to be perfect?

The objection implicit in the rhetorical questions is altogether natural; but it is flawed. It is flawed in just the same way in which complaints about the behavior of *human* persons are often flawed: it depends on a particular interpretation of behavior that can in fact be interpreted in any of a number of different ways, depending upon what assumptions we make about the person's beliefs, desires, motives, dispositions, and overall personality.

A senior member of your department doesn't greet you in the hallway. Is he offended by you? Does he think you're beneath him? Is he depressed and having a bad day? Or is that *just*

¹⁰ *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light*, edited with commentary by B. Kolodiejchuk (New York: Doubleday, 2007), p. 187.

him, a little pre-occupied and not really noticing his surroundings? You're on a day trip with a colleague from another country. You try a few times to strike up conversation, but it never takes off and shortly you find that over an hour has passed in almost total silence. Is your colleague disrespecting you? Is she playing a power game, trying to force you to carry the conversation or some such thing? Does she find you boring, or intimidating? Or is the silence an indication of nothing more or less than the fact that she is somewhat introverted and doesn't happen to have a whole lot to say (to anyone) at the moment? Answering questions like this with any reliability requires substantial information about what sort of person one is dealing with—about the person's cultural background, about what sorts of social norms he or she is likely to recognize and respect, about his or her views about what various kinds of behavior (both verbal and not) communicate to others, about his or her general 'style' of interacting with other people, and so on. But if this is what it takes to interpret the behavior of an ordinary human person, imagine how difficult it must be to interpret the behavior of an invisible and transcendent *divine* person.

Seen in this light, the suggestion that divine silence *in and of itself* somehow indicates disinterest or lack of love and concern on God's part is absurd. Even granting the complete reliability and transparency of Biblical testimony about God, we have precious little by way of clear and reliable information about God's personality and about his general 'style' of interacting with others; and to ask about God's "culture" or about what sorts of social norms God would likely recognize and respect seems to border on the overly anthropomorphic. God is as alien and "wholly other" from us as it is possible for another person to be. Thus, it is hard to see how we could say with any confidence at all what his silence indicates. Indeed, even to suppose that divine silence is *unlikely* given DIVINE CONCERN seems to me to involve quite a lot of

unwarranted assumptions about the degree to which divine modes of interaction would likely resemble 21st Century human modes of interaction.

Granted, divine silence *would* indicate a lack of concern for rational creatures if we had good reason to think that God had provided no way for us to find him or to experience his presence in the midst of his silence. This would indicate a lack of concern because it would indicate that God is trying to prevent us from finding him, or at least doing nothing to help, and thus bringing about something that is both intrinsically very bad for us and totally beyond our control. In the next section, however, I'll argue that, in fact, there is reason to think that God *has* provided ways for us to find him and to experience his presence in the midst of his silence.

The point of this section thus far, then, might be summed up this way: Silence is an interpretable kind of behavior; and, as with any other person, God's behavior doesn't wear its interpretation on its sleeve—it can be understood only in the light of substantial background information. To be sure, divine silence *could* be an indication of divine rejection or lack of concern. But that interpretation is entirely optional, given our evidence. Divine silence might instead simply be a reflection of the fact that God prefers to communicate with us and to draw us into his presence in ways other than ones that would render either INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE or ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE false. It might just be a reflection of God's personality, so to speak.

The pressing question, of course, is what to do with the fact that God's silence is painful for us. Many believers experience crippling doubt, overwhelming sadness, and ultimate loss of faith as a result of ongoing silence from their heavenly Father. On the assumption that God exists and that a loving relationship with God is a great good, it would appear that many people have been positively damaged by divine silence. Isn't it just this that leads us to take divine

silence as evidence of God's lack of concern? Perhaps silence is just an outgrowth of God's personality; but then, the objector might say, God's personality is just that of a distant, unconcerned ruler rather than that of a loving and attentive parent.

The problem with this objection is that it completely ignores the fact that sometimes our being pained by another person's behavior is *our* problem rather than theirs—due to our own dysfunctional attitudes and ways of relating to others, our own epistemic or moral vices, our own immaturity, and the like. In such cases, it is our responsibility to find a way out of our suffering rather than the other person's responsibility to stop behaving in the ways that cause us pain.¹¹ As it happens, in cases like this we can benefit if the other person exercises her right to persist in her behavior: we can grow in maturity or in our ability to relate to others, for example. But if we are indeed *unreasonably* pained by her behavior, then her right to persist in her behavior is independent of this potential benefit: she can persist regardless of whether she believes that the benefit is at all likely to be realized (indeed, even if she somehow knows that it will not be). To suppose otherwise—to suppose that she would have to stop if there weren't some benefit to persisting that somehow outweighed or defeated our suffering—is, I think, just to deny that it is possible for one person to be unreasonably pained by the behavior of another. Those who do deny this cannot make use of the response I am offering to the problem of divine hiddenness; but, to my mind, denying it is wholly implausible.

Let me be clear here about terminology. As I am using the term, *unreasonable suffering* refers to suffering that is the result of vice, immaturity, or some other disposition on the part of

¹¹ Note that the view being articulated here is not quite the same as the view that 'divine hiddenness is due to human blindness'. According to the latter view, INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE is false, and the relevant evidence for God's existence could be seen if only we weren't blinded to it by our own sin. (For a full presentation of this view, see William Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God.") On the view that I am presenting, however, INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE is taken for granted, our own faulty *interpretation* of divine silence is what is to blame for our finding it objectionable, and sin is only one among several possible explanations for why we interpret divine silence in the way that we do. (You might not be culpable for your own present immaturity, for example, even if you have a responsibility to overcome it.)

the sufferer for which the sufferer is morally responsible, and which consequently places no general demand upon the person causing the suffering to stop her problematic behavior. So in cases where X is suffering unreasonably in response to the behavior of Y, it will be wholly appropriate for Y to persist even if no greater goods come to X or to other people as a result of her doing so. Compassion for X might require that Y do something to help X get past her suffering. But it will not require that X desist from her behavior. The suffering of others should always move us, of course; but it is simply not true that compassion, love, or any other virtue requires us to submit unboundedly to manipulation by the unreasonable responses of others. Moreover, if the problematic behavior is *silence*, compassion will not even require that Y explain her behavior or act in other ways that make it clear to X that she is trying to show compassion; for doing either of these things is incompatible with maintaining silence.

Thus, if it is possible for one person to suffer unreasonably in response to the silence of another, then it is possible that there be persons X and Y such that X is pained by Y's silence, but it is wholly appropriate for Y to remain silent even though her silence promotes no greater good for X or for anyone else, and even if it appears (falsely) to X and to others as if she is making no effort at showing compassion toward X. Indeed, not only might it be wholly appropriate for Y to remain silent under these conditions, but her doing so might be consistent with the supposition that she has *perfect love* for X. For to suppose otherwise is to suppose that her remaining silent is a failure of love on her part, which implies that X's suffering, no matter what the ultimate explanation for it might be, places an automatic demand upon Y to desist from her silence, which, in turn, implies that X's suffering is not unreasonable after all.

Obviously the suggestion here is that believers who are pained by divine silence might be in just this sort of situation with respect to God. That is, it might be that our suffering in the face

of divine silence is unreasonable, due more to our own immaturity or dysfunction than to any lack of kindness on God's part. Perhaps it is largely just a result of our own untrusting, uncharitable interpretations of divine silence, or from an inappropriate refusal to accept God for who God is and to accept God's preferences about when and in what ways to communicate with us. Perhaps there are ways of experiencing the world that are fully available to us (either as we are now or as we would be if only we would strive for maturity in the ways that we ought to) and that would allow us to be content with or even to appreciate the silence of God in the midst of our joys and sufferings.

It helps, in this vein, to be reminded of a fact about God and a fact about ordinary human relationships. The fact about God is that the most enigmatic, eccentric, and complicated people we might ever encounter in literature or in real life are, by comparison with God, utterly familiar and mundane. The fact about human relationships is that experiencing the silence of another person can, in the right context and seen in the right way, be an incredibly rich way of experiencing the *person*—all the more so with a person who is sufficiently beyond you in intellect, wisdom, and virtue. A wise and virtuous person who is utterly beyond you intellectually and silently leads you on a journey might teach you a lot more about herself and about other things on your journey than she would if she tried to tell you all of the things that she wants to teach you. In such a case, objecting to the silence, interpreting it as an offence, or wishing that the person would just talk to you rather than make you figure things out for yourself might just be childish—an immature refusal to tolerate legitimate differences among persons and to be charitable in the way that you interpret another's behavior. And there is no reason to think that the person would owe it to you to cater to these objections—even if her decision to be silent

was arrived at not for the sake of your greater good, but simply because *that's who she is, and that's how she prefers to communicate with people like you.*¹²

I imagine that some might be tempted to caricature the view I have been developing as follows:

SILENT FATHER: God, on this view, is like a man who neglects his children, leaving them bereft and unloved while he sits in stony silence thinking “I just gotta be me.” The suffering that results from this sort of behavior is intense, and (if it truly promotes no human good) entirely gratuitous; for, just as it would cost a man nothing to break his silence momentarily to whisper words of love and encouragement to his children, likewise it would cost God nothing to deviate from his own preferred mode of interaction to communicate divine love more widely and fully to all of creation.

But there are at least two problems with the caricature that, I think, undermine its force as an objection against my view.

First, the Silent Father analogy is apt only if God's behavior toward the world is more like the God of deism than the God of classical theism. The deistic God is highly non-interactive; the God of classical theism, on the other hand, is intimately involved with creation, active in revealing himself (albeit not as widely or clearly as many of us would prefer), and—according to the Christian story—concerned enough about creation to become incarnate, suffer,

¹² Admittedly, *leading on a journey* is a communicative act; so the person in this example is not *totally* silent. Is this a relevant disanalogy? I don't think so. Recall, for one thing, that, though I have granted ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE and INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE, I have not conceded that God is *totally* silent. But, more importantly, the illustration could be modified to get rid of the disanalogy. Drop the supposition that the person is *leading you on a journey*, and suppose instead that you are touring a museum with the following background beliefs: (a) the curator has arranged things in the museum with *you* in mind, and wants very much to show you things about yourself, about life, and about his personality via the arrangement; and (b) the curator, though in fact silent and invisible, is nevertheless watching as you tour, can be talked to, can talk with you at any time, and can alter things in the museum in response to your communications. (I have heard roughly this sort of analogy in a variety of sermons over the years. If it has an original printed source, I am unaware of it.)

and die on a cross for the sake of humankind. Of course, the objector will complain that we do not have enough evidence even about God's existence, much less his behavior, to be sure that these claims on the part of theists are true. But the relevant point here is that neither do we have enough evidence to be sure that they are false. There are, in other words, no grounds for saying with any confidence that *if God exists, he is neglectful of creation in the way that the Silent Father is neglectful of his children.*

Second, the caricature fails to take seriously the possibility that God might have a genuine, robust personality, and that it might be *deeply good* for God to live out his own personality. One odd feature of much contemporary philosophy of religion is that it seems to portray God as having a "personality" that is almost entirely empty, allowing his behavior to be almost exhaustively determined by facts about how it would be best *for others* for an omnipotent being to behave. But why should we grant this portrayal, or anything like it? God is supposed to be a person not only of unsurpassable love and goodness, but of unsurpassable beauty.¹³ And it is not at all clear that God could be that sort of person if the portrayal of God as (effectively) a cosmic, others-oriented utility-maximizing machine were correct. For it is hard to see how a *person* could manage to be unsurpassably beautiful, or even very beautiful at all, without having a highly complex personality and motivational structure. But if we grant that God has a highly complex personality and motivational structure, and if we also grant that it would be deeply good for God to live out God's personality, then even straightforward utilitarian calculations *might* rule in favor of God's persisting in silence despite the suffering that it causes (provided God is behaving compassionately toward his creatures in other ways, and so on). Or the goods and evils here might be incommensurable: it might be good for God to be who God is, and bad for

¹³ Or a tri-person, depending on what brand of theism (or even what brand of *Trinitarian* theism) you subscribe to. But let us ignore this complication for now.

us to suffer; and there might be no metric for comparing the good with the bad. Either way, if it is deeply good for God to live out the divine personality, and if our suffering is furthermore unreasonable, the result of immaturity or other dysfunctions that we can and should overcome anyway, then I see no reason why even perfect love would require God to desist from his preferred mode of interaction in order to alleviate our suffering

On the view that I am developing, then, it is not true that the suffering produced by divine silence is gratuitous; for it is not true that divine silence serves *no good whatsoever*. If, as I am suggesting, divine silence is an outgrowth of the divine personality or of God's preferences about how to interact with creatures like us, then divine silence is plausibly thought of as good in and of itself, or good as a means to the expression of the perfectly good and beautiful divine personality. Moreover, if, as I have suggested, there are ways of experiencing divine silence that we would find non-burdensome or even beautiful, and if God's persisting in his silence provides opportunities for us to grow in maturity or in our ability to relate to others, then divine silence might even be good for us. My point is simply that it *need not* be good for us in order for God to be justified in persisting in silence; for divine silence might promote goods without promoting *human* goods.

The question now is whether it is really plausible to suppose that our suffering in response to divine silence is the result of something like immaturity or dysfunction that we ought to overcome on our own. Can we really say such a thing about Mother Teresa, for example? Initially we might balk at saying such a thing. Mother Teresa was widely revered in her lifetime as a woman of great wisdom and virtue.¹⁴ Isn't it implausible at best (perhaps even scandalously offensive or worse) to suggest that *her* relationship with God was marred by dysfunction and

¹⁴ Though not universally so. For a radically different perspective, see Christopher Hitchens, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (New York: Verso, 1995).

immaturity? Moreover, even if one can say such things about Mother Teresa, isn't it simply incredible to suppose that *everyone* who suffers in response to divine silence does so as a result of some sort of dysfunction and immaturity?

Here we must remember our dialectical context. We are assuming that if God exists, then God is perfectly good; we are also assuming that if God exists, divine silence is not permitted for the sake of greater goods or for the prevention of comparable or worse evils. So our only alternatives here are to say (a) that something like the story I have just offered is true, (b) that God does not exist, or (c) that some alternative story consistent with the assumptions laid out in the introduction of this paper is true. Option (a) posits widespread cognitive or emotional dysfunction, even in the likes of Mother Teresa; but, notably, so does option (b). If God does not exist, then the religious experiences that led Mother Teresa to found the Missionaries of Charity and to devote herself to work in the slums of Calcutta were non-veridical, probably hallucinatory;¹⁵ the cognitive faculties responsible for the maintenance of her religious belief are (probably) unreliable;¹⁶ and her ongoing cries to God to break his silence are ultimately just one-sided conversations that express a longing for her childhood hallucinatory experiences to return and both validate and reinforce her ongoing devotion to a being that does not (and probably cannot) exist.¹⁷ More or less the same would hold true for the rest of us who suffer in response to “divine silence” as well. In short, religious believers who suffer in response to divine silence suffer from serious cognitive dysfunction on both of the main options that this paper has in view;

¹⁵ *Come be My Light*, esp. p. 3, and Chs. 3. – 6.

¹⁶ Different religious epistemologies will yield different results on this score. Someone who thinks that Christian belief is produced and maintained by ordinary evidential reasoning, and that we might (though probably wouldn't) have the same evidence we have even if Christian belief is false, wouldn't necessarily be committed to thinking that false Christian belief would have to be produced by unreliable mechanisms. Someone like Alvin Plantinga, however, who thinks that Christian belief is likely produced and maintained by the operation of something like John Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*—a faculty whose proper function is to detect the presence of God—would be so committed. (Cf. *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 000)

¹⁷ If, as many theists think, God exists necessarily if at all, then if God *does* not exist, God *cannot* exist.

so the fact that (a) posits serious cognitive dysfunction in the likes of Mother Teresa can't be a reason for preferring (b) to (a). It could, I suppose, be a reason for preferring (c) to (a). But that reason is defeated, I think, by the fact that no viable alternative (consistent with all of the assumptions laid out in the introductory section) is yet available. And, in any case, option (c) isn't something that an atheist can accept, so it's not something that helps those who want to use the problem of divine hiddenness as an argument against the existence of God.

Note, however, that everything I've said so far about why divine silence need not conflict with DIVINE CONCERN has been said under the supposition that the following claim is true:

DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE: God has provided some widely and readily accessible way
 of finding him and experiencing his presence despite his
 silence.

If that supposition is false—if there is no divine self-disclosure whatsoever—then most of what I have said in this section falls flat. For in that case, most of us have been entirely cut off from God's presence; and if we have been entirely cut off from God's presence, then I can't very well argue that divine silence might possibly be interpreted as a result of God's desire to *communicate with* or *be present to* us in other ways. If we have been entirely cut off from God's presence, then has done or permitted something that is both devastatingly harmful to us and totally out of our control, and it is much harder to make plausible the suggestion that God has taken reasonable steps to be compassionate towards us in the midst of our suffering. Thus, there is a more serious, perhaps even intractable problem reconciling God's behavior with NO HUMAN GOOD and DIVINE CONCERN. Thus, in the next section I will argue that there is good reason to think that DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE obtains despite the fact that God is silent. This will complete my defense of

the claim that divine silence is compatible with the conjunction of DIVINE CONCERN and NO HUMAN GOOD.

III. Narrative, Liturgy, and the Presence of God

My goal in this section is to defend DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE. The literature on divine hiddenness seems largely to take it for granted that DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true only if either INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE or ABSENCE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE is false. Presumably the idea is that the presence of God is *widely* and *readily* accessible only if either there is conclusive empirical or a priori evidence of the existence of God, or many people are having subjective experiences that at least seem to be direct experiences of the presence of God. What this supposition ignores, however, is the possibility of *mediated* experiences of the presence of God through media that are themselves widely and readily accessible. In order to make a case for the conclusion that this possibility ought to be taken seriously, I'll first have to explain what I mean by 'mediated experiences of the presence of God'; then I'll have to provide plausible candidates for media through which those experiences might be had.

The difference between mediated experiences of an object or event and direct experiences of the same thing is *like* the difference between Parfit-style quasi-memory of a thing and direct perception of it. As Parfit characterizes them, quasi-memories, or 'q-memories' are apparent memories that are genuinely about *someone's* experiences, though not necessarily about experiences of the person having the q-memory.¹⁸ So, for example, if I step into a duplication machine, my duplicate will have q-memories of my life, but not genuine memories (since they will 'feel like memory' for him, without being genuine memories of *his* experiences). The crucial thing to note here is that q-memory provides a person with roughly the same *sort* of information

¹⁸ Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," *The Philosophical Review* 80 (1971): 3 – 27, at p. 15.

about a thing as direct experience of it would provide, and it can do so even if the person has never in fact had a direct experience of the thing. In q-memory, you experience to an attenuated degree *what it is like to be in the presence of the event or object that is q-remembered* without ever having to experience its presence directly.

There is a well-known and controversial thought experiment in the philosophy of mind the upshot of which is supposed to be that first-hand experiences of sensible properties (like redness) convey *information* that could not possibly be conveyed by even the most complete physical descriptions of the property, things having the property, or what is involved in experiencing the property. In short, the thought experiment invites us to imagine a woman (Mary) who has never experienced redness but who has come to be in possession of a maximally complete physical description of everything pertaining to the phenomenon of redness and the experience thereof. We are then invited to consider the question whether she would *learn* anything upon coming to experience redness for the first time. At least initially, it is hard to resist the intuition that she would, and that the information she acquires is just information about *what it is like to experience redness*.¹⁹

Suppose this is right. (For present purposes I'll ignore the fact that this conclusion is controversial.²⁰) The thing to notice is that even if it is true that the information Mary acquires couldn't have been gotten by way of physical descriptions, it seems clear that it *could* have been acquired by means other than being in the presence of something red. Implanted q-memories of redness would do it, as would Matrix-style virtual experiences of redness. The case of q-memory

¹⁹ The example is due to Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 127 – 36. For discussion, see the essays in *There's Something about Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument*, edited by Peter Ludlow, Yujin Nagasawa, and Daniel Stoljar (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

²⁰ The controversy doesn't matter much for present purposes. What ultimately matters is the much less controversial idea that there is a *sui generis* quality to experiencing a thing that is *lost* in mere descriptions of it but that can be mediated by something like q-memory.

is the one that interests me most, however, because there is no question that q-remembered experiences of redness would be and *feel* different from direct experiences of redness. (This isn't so clear in the case of Matrix-style virtual experiences.) Importantly, in q-memory of redness we get some even if not all of the very same non-propositional information about redness that we get through direct experience thereof. It is in precisely this sense that q-memory is a way of having mediated experiences of redness.

I turn now to the question of what sorts of things might plausibly be thought to mediate experiences of the presence of God. In her recent work on the problem evil, Eleonore Stump has pursued the project of theodicy by way of extended literary-critical treatment of a variety of Biblical narratives.²¹ Rather than treating, say, the story of Job or the story of Abraham and Isaac as brief toy examples that illustrate particular principles that then go on to get discussed in the analytic mode, she presents these and other stories in detail, tries as much as possible to help us understand the motives, desires, and experiences of the characters involved, and aims in so doing to show us that we can learn useful things from the narratives that simply cannot be expressed propositionally. What matters for theodicy is the philosophical usefulness of what we learn from the Biblical narratives; but what matters for present purposes is more their subject matter.

I'll begin with some terminology. According to Stump, the Biblical narratives that she discusses—the story of Job, the story of Abraham and Isaac, the story of Samson, and so on—are *second person accounts* of the events they relate. A second person account, in her terminology, is just a narrative that communicates the content of a *second person experience*. A second person experience is, roughly, a conscious experience of another conscious person *as* a person. A conversation with your child, an exchange of glances at a coffee shop, a hug—these are

²¹ See, especially, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and “The Problem of Evil: Analytic Philosophy and Narrative,” pp. 251 – 64 in Oliver D. Crisp and Michael Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: New Essays in the Philosophy of Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.)

paradigm instances of second person experiences, to be contrasted, say, with a surgeon's 'objectifying' experience of an unconscious patient on an operating table or with your own conscious awareness of yourself.²²

According to Stump, second person *experiences* provide a particular kind of non-propositional knowledge, very much like whatever sort of knowledge Mary acquires upon coming to experience redness for the first time. Indeed, the example that she uses to illustrate and defend this point is just an adaptation of the Black-and-White Mary thought experiment. She considers a woman who has never experienced the presence of her own mother, but who has access to as much propositional information as you please about her. On Stump's view, when the woman meets her mother for the first time, she acquires new knowledge: namely, the non-propositional awareness of what it is like to experience her mother.

Stump then goes on to argue that second person *accounts* are able to communicate roughly the same knowledge that one gets from a second person experience by making that experience available to us through the narrative. Note too that the claim that second person accounts make second person experiences "available" to us is to be taken quite seriously and robustly. Her view, I take it, is that the accounts make the experiences available not by giving us mere propositional information about the experiences (although they do in fact do this too), but by somehow putting us in touch with the experience in a way analogous to that in which q-memory might put us in touch with an experience.²³ Thus, putting (what I take to be) her view into my own terminology, I'd say that second person accounts *mediate* second person experiences, just as q-memories mediate sensory experiences. This is why attention to Biblical

²² On the concept of 'objectifying', cf. Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation" (1941, reprinted in *New Testament and Mythology* by Rudolf Bultmann, edited, selected, and translated by Schubert Ogden, [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984]), and Bas van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), Ch. 4.

²³ So I interpret her, anyway; she doesn't herself invoke the concept of q-memory.

narrative figures so importantly in Stump's theodical project. Many Biblical narratives—in particular, the ones Stump considers in her manuscript—are second person accounts of suffering human beings' second person experiences of God. On Stump's view, attention to the narratives provides us with (what I would call) mediated experiences of God's goodness; and the knowledge we acquire by way of these mediated experiences can be put to philosophical use in formulating a theodicy. How exactly the theodicy might go is, of course, tangential to my present concerns, so I'll pass over that for now. What matters is just the fact that, if Stump is right, attention to Biblical narrative is one way of acquiring mediated experiences of the divine presence.

Note, too, that, a second person experience is, by definition, a *conscious awareness of another person as a person*. Second person experience is thus to be distinguished from what one might be tempted to label 'third person' or 'objectifying' experience of another person: e.g., the sort of experience one might have another if one regarded her as a mere object. The import of this for present purposes is that a certain kind of 'seeing as' is a necessary condition for experiencing the presence of another person as such: one has to consciously regard the other *as a person*. Experiencing the person while seeing her as nothing more than a cleverly contrived automaton, for example, would be a wholly different kind of experience. Likewise, then, one would expect that a similar sort of 'seeing as' would be involved in having mediated experiences of the presence of another person. Thus, for example, if one were to read a story about Fred's second person experiences of Wilma while failing to see Wilma as a (real) person—perhaps regarding her as a fictional character, or a figment of Fred's imagination—the experiences conveyed by the narrative would be different and, in that event, there would be no reason to think that the narrative would in any sense be mediating Wilma's presence. If this is right, then

whether Biblical narratives mediate the presence of God will depend importantly upon whether one takes those narratives to be reporting real experiences of God.

Something similar might be said about liturgical actions.²⁴ Gesturing roughly in this direction, Nicholas Wolterstorff argues that the function of liturgical acts are primarily commemorative acts, and that commemorative acts are importantly linked to *memory*. Thus, he writes:

Commemorations are meant to produce the memory of something in someone, or intensify the memory, or keep the memory alive; or to bring the remembered entity actively before the mind for a while, etc. ... [T]o do something in commemoration of a certain event is to bring it about that the action signifies, or stands in for, that event; and...to produce something as a commemoration of some entity is to bring it about that the object signifies, or stands in for, that entity. (Wolterstorff, “The Remembrance of Things (Not) Past: Philosophical Reflections on Christian Liturgy”:: 136, 139)

Liturgical acts, like the Eucharist, he argues, are commemorative of past events, like the Last Supper. Moreover, many (though not Wolterstorff, exactly) are inclined to see commemoration as a way of actualizing, or making present the things commemorated. Describing this view, Wolterstorff writes:

Over and over in our century it has been said that the saving events of God which are commemorated in the liturgy are *made present*, or *actualized*, by way of the performance of the liturgy. The acts of God commemorated are not just

²⁴ This idea was inspired by a paper (quoted here later on) given by Sarah Coakley at the Philosophy and Liturgy Conference at Calvin College, May 2008. The paper is “Beyond ‘Belief’: Liturgy and the Cognitive Apprehension of God.” However, the paper doesn’t argue for or even assert the claim that liturgy mediates the presence of God, and the remarks therein that are suggestive of that view are not really fleshed out enough for me to attribute to her the sorts of views that I’m developing here.

acknowledged as having present significance; in some way the commemoration makes them actually present. One finds this position espoused, for example, in the comments of [Sigmund] Mowinckel and [Brevard] Childs on the liturgy of biblical Israel. Here is what Childs says in one place: “When Israel observes the Sabbath in order to remember the events of her redemption, she is participating again in the Exodus event. Memory functions as an actualization (Vergegenwärtigung) of the decisive event in her tradition.” (“Remembrance,” p. 153; the quotation from Childs is from *Memory and Tradition in Israel* [London, SCM: 1962], p. 53)

In the end, Wolterstorff rejects the position described here as obviously false if taken literally. “God does not bring it about that the resurrection of Christ occurs when the liturgy is performed,” he writes. (155) But my own inclination is to think that what Childs and other adherents of the commemoration-as-actualization view are gesturing at is just the idea (which I have been articulating here) that, like q-memory, and like certain kinds of narrative, commemorative events, in the right context and undertaken in the right ways, *mediate the presence* of the events which they commemorate.

If this is right, then liturgical acts, too, can be ways of experiencing the mediated presence of God. As with Biblical narratives, a certain amount of ‘seeing as’ will be required for the divine presence to be mediated at all. For example, if the function of (some) liturgical acts is indeed to commemorate (or something like that), then, at the very least, one will have to see the liturgy as a vehicle for putting us in touch with historical events in which God himself was an actor. Moreover, it might be that one’s ability to experience the presence of God in the liturgy requires practice and training. Thus, for example, in the course of arguing for the conclusion that

there might be some sense in which a liturgy might aptly be characterized as *true*, Sarah Coakley writes:

...it could...be that the deeper ‘truth’ at stake in the liturgy is not propositional at all, but ‘truth’ in the particular sense intended by Christ when he said, according to John, that *he* was himself ‘the way, the truth, and the life’. The intersection of liturgy and ‘truth’ would then consist in the liturgy’s capacity to train one’s sensibility to the presence of Christ in the same liturgy, and to knit one more deeply into his ‘true body’ through sacramental ingestion, attention to his Word, and the sharing of his communal love in the Spirit. (“Beyond ‘Belief’,” MS p. 4)

She goes on to argue that “what is distinctive to liturgical ‘knowing’...is the way that bodily movement, sensual acuity, affective longing, and noetic or intellectual response, are intricately entwined and mutually implicated in what is occurring, and indeed are being trained over time to intensify and deepen their capacity for response to the risen Christ.” (“Beyond Belief”, p. 15)

I must admit that I find it very difficult to see what the concepts of liturgical *truth* and liturgical *knowing* really amount to. But I have reproduced Coakley’s remarks here because I think that they are at least suggestive of the sort of view that I have been developing: namely, that (a) the right sort of participation in liturgical acts mediates the presence of God, and (b) the extent to which the divine presence is mediated depends importantly upon the (trainable) sensibilities that one brings to the experience.

If the foregoing is correct, then (given that Biblical narrative and the right sorts of liturgical forms—whatever those might be—are readily and widely accessible) DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true. And if DIVINE SELF-DISCLOSURE is true, then (so I have argued) divine silence is unproblematic. But we can go a step further, I think. I suggested earlier that there

might be ways of experiencing divine silence contentedly, and perhaps even appreciatively—even while enduring suffering. I think that this suggestion is more plausible in light of the arguments just given than it is on its own. For if liturgy and Biblical narrative mediate the presence of God, it is easier to see what the source of contentment and appreciation might be. Suffering human beings longing for the presence of God can go to the scriptures and the liturgy and find it—in small and mediated ways to be sure, but nevertheless in ways that provide them with the resources to see themselves not as lost and abandoned by God but rather as living daily in the presence of a loving but silent God.