

## The Punishment of God


Fr. Peter Phạm Hồng Khương<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Catholic Institute of Vietnam, Vietnam

<sup>1</sup> Vinh Long Diocese, Vinh Long province, Vietnam

\* Corresponding author's email: [petphamkhuong@gmail.com](mailto:petphamkhuong@gmail.com)

\*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1796-5047>

\*  <https://doi.org/10.54855/csl.222411>

Received: 26/06/2022

Revision: 04/08/2022

Accepted: 06/08/2022

Online: 16/08/2022

### Abstract

People who experience hardship as a result of diseases and natural calamities sometimes ask "why?" and frequently believe that God is punishing them. This essay will shed light on whether God punishes or not. Why does God discipline? What is the Punisher's purpose?

These questions are answered to demonstrate that God is good. Evils, both physical and moral, are not God's will. Everyone wants to make others better.

**Keywords:** punishment, evil, moral, Old Testament, mercy

### Introduction

With the proliferation of the Coronavirus, also known as Covid-19, and the deaths it has caused, many of us ask "why?" Why did a pandemic occur? Why did God permit the pandemic to occur? Why does God not intervene when we cry out in pain and even out of dread of being let down? God's punishment of the world? To further comprehend this subject, let's examine whether God punishes or not in greater detail. Why does God discipline? And God's retribution for what?

#### *Does God punish?*

To better understand this issue, let's learn about the evil people have to endure in the world. Many people think that physical or moral evil is a punishment from God, but that is not the case.

It is a very difficult thing because if evil exists by its essence nature, we also define evil only as a good that has been degraded by evil, and evil is always mixed with the good as Etienne Borne said: "*We can never define evil directly. Not only because evil always goes hand in hand with the good, but because it is impossible to enumerate an evil without mentioning a good, evil is the lack of good.*"<sup>1</sup>

Evil can be physical or moral. Being physically evil when lacking the material (illness, hardship, natural disaster...)<sup>2</sup>; moral evil that starts from deviating from the right

<sup>1</sup> DOMINIQUE MORIN, Gọi Tên Thượng Đế, original "Pour Dire Dieu", Publisher. Cerf 1989, Dang Xuan Thanh and Luy Nguyen Anh Tuan translated Oriental Publishing House, 2008, p. 207.

<sup>2</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, translation of the Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, Religious Publishing House, 2012, No. 310.

order of conduct in the conduct of man, the only being responsible for his actions when he causes evils, sins, and shortcomings...<sup>3</sup> In both cases, evil originates from creatures: on the physical level, things arise from the main nature of being (e.g., volcanoes). On the moral aspect evil arises from abuses of human freedom (for example, supporting abortion).

From the above arises an important question: Is God the author of evil? Why did He not prohibit it? Philosophy and theology answer that God - perfect, absolute, eternal - cannot be a direct or indirect agent of evil. This always comes from the creature, imperfect, relative, and temporal. God can stop all evil, but He does not want to do it so as not to interfere artificially with the laws of nature. In the works of Enchiridion, "*The Prohibition of Christian Doctrine*", written in 423, Augustine asserts that God will not allow evil to happen unless better things are drawn to it. Indeed, all suffering, however pitiful and incomprehensible, is a school for human and spiritual maturity for those who make use of it.

Thus, God does not punish, He wants to leave everything according to the laws of nature, and one of the most important things is to respect human freedom.

### *Purpose of punishment?*

God is good; as we learn above that God does not punish. But reading in the Old Testament many times, we see God punishing the nations, including his own. So why is that? And so, what does it mean?

In the book of Genesis, in chapters 2 and 3, testimony in which the author of the Holy Bible gives many literary images to reason about the origin of evil and sin in human life.<sup>4</sup> The fallen man narrative (Gen 3) explains man's sinful state and cause of suffering. Thereby we see that evil is not caused by God<sup>5</sup> but is the consequence of sin. Man has failed to use his freedom to do evil, and then lose his divine happiness with God (Gen 3:23-24).

For the prophets, it was the corrupt soul of man that was the cause of sin. The tendency to follow evil is deeply rooted in human nature (Jer 12:23). Therefore, Basil did not accept the view that moral evil originates from God but that it is rooted in the human heart.<sup>6</sup>

We read in the Old Testament many pages describing natural calamities (from droughts to floods, epidemics, and especially death) as manifestations of God's fit of anger deliver a telling blow at individuals or groups that have already been destroyed, law error. We can cite the following typical passage from Isaiah: "*Behold, the name of the Lord comes from a remote place; Burning is His anger, and dense is His smoke; His*

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>4</sup> GEORG KRAUS, *Sáng Thế Luận Qua Các Tác Giả*, dịch theo SCHOPFUNGSLEHRE, Verlag Styria, Graz, Wien, Köln, 1991, p. 164-167.

<sup>5</sup> MARC DONZÉ, "La Pensée Théologique de Maurice Zundel Pauvreté et Liberation", Maurice Zundel Theological Thought – Purification and Liberation, translated by Nguyen Thi Chung, Tôn Giáo, 2004, p. 342-343.

<sup>6</sup> GEORG KRAUS, *Sáng Thế Luận Qua Các Tác Giả*, translated by Schopfungslehre, Verlag Styria, Graz, Wien, Köln, 1991, p. 177.

*lips are filled with indignation, and His tongue is like a consuming fire ... For Topheth has long been ready, indeed, it has been prepared for the king. He has made it deep and large, a pyre of fire with plenty of wood; The breath of the Lord, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire” (Is 30:27-33).* Similar passages can be found many times in the Old Testament, and of course impossible to take the literal meaning. The reason is that no one has seen the burning face of the Lord, his shouting lips. The author only understands the figurative meaning that calamities are likened to punishments that God sends on sinners, whether they are individuals or a collective.

If it is said that God is angry to punish people, is that true? Let's find out together to have a clear understanding.

On the one hand, we need to overcome some misconceptions about the explanation of natural phenomena. Previously, natural disasters (drought, flood, crop failure, epidemiology) were explained as God pouring out his wrath on the earth. Today, we should no longer simply combine plagues with sin. Their causes are very complex. We cannot explain the annual flood in central Vietnam as a punishment for the people of this region; the reason is that it is unlikely that they committed more crimes than people in southern Vietnam.

On the other hand, couldn't God create a world in which people do not have to suffer any kind of torture? The Church affirms that: Almighty God could do this, but he did not, but created a world in a state of perfection, towards ultimate perfection. Thus, for how long creation has not yet reached its perfection, there is also a bad physical evil for the same physical good. In other words, creation has to grow to be perfect, but to be perfect, it has to be transformed, and transformation requires a lot of suffering that we humans call evil.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, God has the power to send trials to people while living on earth. Challenges can conduce many benefits to people, even if it causes people to work hard and sacrifice in their own struggles and victories. Challenge purifies man and makes him grow up. Challenges give people the opportunity to prove their love for God (the story of Job is an example). When people overcome challenges like an athlete, people joyfully receive Kingdom rewards.

### *God's punishment to purify people*

God's punishment is not to destroy man. But this punishment wants to make people better.

For example, people can punish themselves for their shortcomings. This may be the case for people who like to smoke despite knowing the dangers it brings to their health. Does smoking not cause cancer or emphysema? Is not environmental imbalance a natural reaction to the attacks which it has to endure? There is a proverb that *"God always forgives, but nature never forgives man"*. This helps us better understand why some - but not all - of evil always to perform again.

---

<sup>7</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, translation of the Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, Tôn Giáo, 2012, No. 310.

Regardless of all of the above, there are still people who think that illness or other problems are punishment for the sins of a person or their ancestors. The Gospels refute this idea: standing before a blind from birth, Jesus is asked if it was his sins or those of his parents that made him so blind. Jesus said that *“It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents”*. But rather: for that evil (blindness) to be transformed into good (that is, for God's work to be done in him) (Jn 9:1-3).

And will the evils be displayed against us and have any effect? Really no. They can attack those who fear them because they have no force in themselves, no power because they are influenced and believe that evil is stronger than God. This is sin. Nothing can defeat God, so take courage! Don't do anything bad. Think good, belief and nothing can attack you. That is what God has promised through His Word (Rom 8:31-37).

### Conclusion

In summary, After researching, we found that. God is generous in mercy. It's not His punishment on people. Evils happen in life to help people to purify and be more conscious of their weak destiny. God gave man freedom, so man has the right to decide his own life. Good or bad is for people to choose. To have a feeling of responsibility, to use our freedom properly, and live as God wants.

### References

- Catechism of the Catholic Church (2012). translation of the Vietnam Bishops' Conference, Tôn Giáo.
- Dominique Morin (2008). Gọi Tên Thượng Đế, original "Pour Dire Dieu", Publisher. Cerf 1989, Dang Xuan Thanh and Luy Nguyen Anh Tuan translator, Oriental Press.
- Georg Kraus (1991). Sáng Thế Luận Qua Các Tác Giả, translated by Schopfungslere, Verlag Styria, Graz, Wien, Koln.
- Marc Donzé (2004). "La Pensée Théologique de Maurice Zundel Pauvreté et Liberation", Maurice Zundel Theological Thought – Purification and Liberation, Translated by Nguyen Thi Chung, Publishing House. Religion.

### Biodata

Fr. Peter Pham Hong Khuong is a priest of Vinh Long Diocese and an assistant at Vinh Long Cathedral. He was ordained in 2019 and studying the Master of The Theology Program at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam, majoring Bible.