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**Contact Information:**

Byron Belitsos

[byron@originpress.com](mailto:byron@originpress.com)

415-720-6508

*Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic:  
Toward an Integral Theodicy for the Twenty-First Century*

by Byron Belitsos

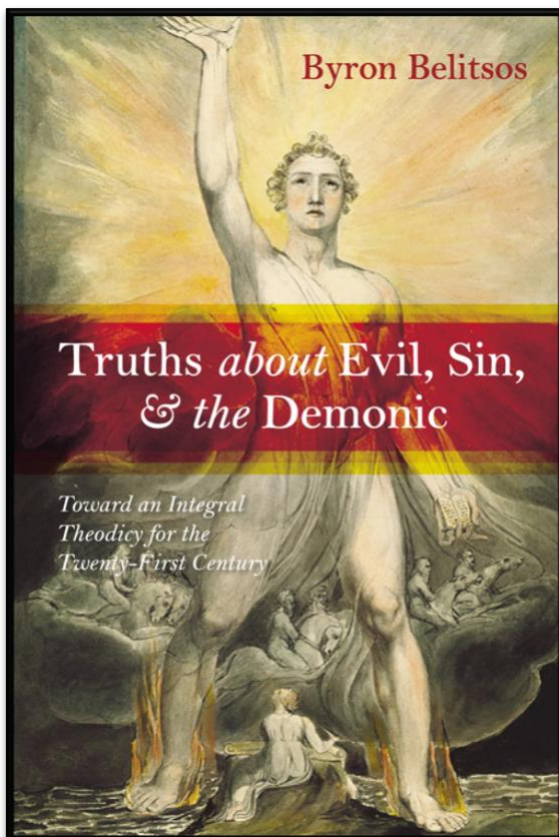
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**New Title from Byron Belitsos**

**Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic:  
*Toward an Integral Theodicy for the Twenty-First Century***



**The Problem of Evil and the Predicament of Theodicy**

As Christians or theists we are moved to share the truth of God's love for humankind. But how can we speak of such providential care in a world rife with crime, war, racism, genocide, and even ecocide? In response to this predicament, a theodicy proposes a rational "defense" of God's goodness that offers consolation to victims and hope to all believers. *Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic* provides a sweeping history of the discipline of theodicy that focuses on its strategic turning points and its possible future. Belitsos argues that, because of the atrocities of the last century and the threat of horrendous evils in the coming century, we need to marshal the most explanatory elements of all previous theodicies and then drive toward an "integrative" model based on a creative synthesis. The author also turns to a modern revelatory source that supports his argument for such a "meta-theodicy." He concludes by critically engaging with this source and the entire tradition in his call for an apophatically informed integral theodicy.

**Byron Belitsos** holds a BA in history of ideas from the University of Chicago and an MA in systematic theology from Union Theological Seminary in New York City. For several decades Belitsos has been an independent scholar and an award-winning book publisher, editor, and author. His previous acclaimed books include *Your Evolving Soul* (2017), *A Return to Healing* (2009), and *One World Democracy* (2005).

**What do you mean by “the problem of evil”? Why do we need a theodicy to address it?**

People of faith wonder why an omnipotent God of love allows us to suffer from so much adversity and so many dreadful evils. To meaningfully address such questions requires a coherent narrative about the providence of God—that is, a theodicy. *Truths About Evil, Sin, and the Demonic* tackles this specific problem because of the acute conditions of life in the twenty-first century.

**What are the central issues you address?**

The book addresses three critical questions:

1. Given that our God is loving and omnipotent, why do we witness so much crime, warfare, and corruption in our world—including such horrors as genocide and ecocide?
2. How can we as Christians or theists construct a theodicy that sustains our faith in the face of so much suffering?
3. How can today’s theology bring coherence to a discussion that goes all the way back to the book of Job and has left us with so many different theodicies that often contradict one another?

**3. What is the main accomplishment of *Truths About Evil, Sin, and the Demonic*?**

The greatest difficulty faced by any theodicy is the challenge of horrendous evil—the iniquitous behavior on display in the Holocaust or similar large-scale atrocities. I argue that the proper handling of this predicament requires a “meta-theodicy”—a grand synthesis of the best insights of all prior views, and I propose such a model in the concluding chapters. To reinforce this call for an “integral theodicy,” the book also turns to a purported modern revelatory text that supports such an integrative approach.

**What are the partial “truths” comprising your proposal for an integrative theodicy?**

In this era of interreligious dialogue and comparative theology it is no longer fruitful to focus on any one truth highlighted by a previous theodicy. We instead need to marshal and organize the most explanatory elements of all the previous “classic” and modern theodicies—and then drive toward a creative synthesis. Chief among the basket of elements comprising this synthesis are:

- (1) the biblical cosmic-conflict model of God versus “Satan,” now modernized
- (2) the Orthodox “divine-human partnership” technique of overcoming evil
- (3) a modernized rendition of Augustine’s “free-will defense”
- (5) the “soul-making” theodicy associated with philosopher John Hick

(6) the concept of deity evolution epitomized in process theology

Such an integration can be constructed, I show, with the help of the multidisciplinary method known as integral theory.

### **What is the role of mystery in your quest for a post-modern integral theodicy?**

This book squarely faces up to the problem of horrendous or demonic evil. Honestly confronting this stark reality leaves one in the lap of mystery, or what St. Paul once called “the mystery of iniquity” or what Luther labeled *Deus absconditus*. My integration of a set of partial “solutions” is offered in earnest, but also sets the stage for the concluding argument that an apophatic theodicy—a phrase I have coined—is needed to cap off the whole inquiry with a proper dose of epistemic humility.

### **What motivated you to write this work?**

“My sensitivity to evil, especially horrendous evil, dates back to the Vietnam War atrocities that blighted my teenage years. This book was probably born out of my budding sense in those years that something was deeply wrong with our world, much more than should be, especially if Christ had really lived and died to root out our sinful tendencies. How meaningful can it be to speak of God’s providential care if, even fifty years later, so much of our world is still beset by such a cascading series of maladies? This personal concern explains why, after a lifetime as a journalist, editor, and book publisher, I retired and obtained a graduate degree from Union Theological Seminary in search for answers. This book grows out of my masters thesis at Union in systematic theology.”

### **What is the upshot of this book for believing Christians?**

Typically, we’re told that the all-wise God must have some unfathomable reason for allowing so much radical evil on the face of the earth, even to the point of subjecting his own Son to egregious torture and death. Today humanity has arrived at “ninety seconds to midnight” on the Doomsday Clock, and we are now told that our good and all-powerful God must have in mind an eschatological solution for his children on earth. The survival of Christian faith in each generation requires that the problem of radical evil is carefully addressed and that explanations are lucidly communicated, including reasonable grounds for living a God-centered life. The difficulty of such questions explains why I offer radical solutions for Christians in the concluding chapters of the book.

### **How do you lay out the argument of your book?**

The book’s Prologue is a brief excursus on the book of Job.

PART I: Traditional Theodicy surveys the key theodicies from the first century through the Reformation. The Augustinian formulation known as the “free-will defense of God’s goodness” dominates the Western approach up to and beyond the Protestant Reformation. This long section also covers the two major alternatives to the Augustinian view: the Eastern Orthodox theosis teaching and “biblical cosmic-conflict” model.

PART II: Evolutionary Theodicies covers the post-Enlightenment era, including modernist and later post-modernist efforts that grow out of the scientific evolutionary paradigm. This discussion begins with Leibniz, Kant, and Hegel and culminates in John Hick's soul-making model. It closes with a close look at process theodicy along with its many repercussions including the theological branch known as open and relational theism.

PART III: Integrative Theodicy assumes an evolutionary perspective but reaches out for a multi-perspectival integration of the best insights of previous theodicies, along with the help of the insights of a modern revelatory text plus my novel concept of an apophatic theodicy.

### **What is this revelatory text and why are you introducing it in your book?**

In Part III I turn to a lesser-known source just now entering into the purview of academic theology, The Urantia Book (1955) or "UB," which has quietly sold over a million copies in 24 translations. This material is Christ-centered, interdisciplinary, theologically sophisticated, encyclopedic, and futuristic. Because it spans so many fields and discusses numerous conceptions that touch upon the concerns of theodicy, this text points its readers to an integrative approach to the problem of evil. My argument is that this allegedly revelatory teaching may allow us bring a new clarity and coherence to the field of theodicy, for at least four reasons. First, I attempt to show that the Urantia revelation provides more precise and more systematic definitions of key terms, notably: error, evil, sin, and iniquity or the demonic. Second, the UB claims to update and "correct" key facts and truths concerning morality, theology, eschatology, spirituality, and the problem of evil that have surfaced in all branches of Christianity. This book's audacious set of (alleged) corrections and amplifications of the text of the New Testament are laid out in its 700+ page account of the life and teachings of Jesus. Third, its futuristic "multiverse" cosmology is especially helpful because it provides a meta-framework for a dialectic of evolutionary and eternal deity, as I call it. This structuring of divine resources affords a coherent account of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of divine action. Fourth, for those unfortunate souls who are traumatized by horrendous evils, we are told in the UB that the immediate afterlife provides replete resources for genuine healing from the grossest and most destructive evils that can be visited on an individual. The Urantia Revelation provides what I believe to be the most detailed and plausible depiction of the afterlife available in the world's religious literature.

An Excerpt from *Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic: Toward an Integral Theodicy for the Twenty-First Century*

Theologians have often been driven to formulate “solutions” to the perennial quandary of evil and the gross suffering that results. In ancient times the problem was first addressed with systematic depth in St. Augustine’s so-called free-will defense of God’s goodness. Only much later did this endeavor become the precarious technical discipline of theodicy, which isolates the problem of evil and submits it to theological and philosophic analysis. This book puts what I believe are the best of these efforts on display for your consideration.

I will ask questions such as these: Have such efforts provided real benefit? Have they rescued theism and sincere faith by reconciling the God of love with the depredations of evil? The short answer, as you will see, is both “yes” and “no”: Yes, because most of the classic theodicies seem plausible, and no because they often point us in such different directions that we are often left bewildered and even demoralized.

As a result, unity and coherence have proved elusive. For example, the earliest Christians embraced the idea that fallen angels were the primary source of evil and that salvation came from worshipping the incarnate God-man who deposed their leader Satan, the “god of this world.”

Meanwhile, the Eastern church evolved a rather different view: the doctrine that a humble partnership with God, experienced in a community of faith along with the rites of the church, led to the vanquishing of sinful tendencies.

Saint Augustine argued that depraved human choices arising from original sin explain the presence of evil and that God alone delivered us by gifting us with grace through the sacraments and by mercifully providing for “greater goods” over time (even if many are predestined to suffer in hell eternally).

Luther and Calvin built on this foundation while fully embracing predestination and the “bondage of the will” to sin—which required yet another set of practices and a brand new ecclesiology.

Much later, an important school of theodicy argued that the hardwon character development that accrues from soul-making provides the best rationale for the presence of sin and suffering.

The process theodicians tried yet another tactic altogether, setting aside the central Christian tenet of God’s omnipotence while affirming the stark reality of evil and the need to resolutely confront it while following the gentle lures God provides.

Some postmodern thinkers take refuge in negative theology, a contemporary form of the ancient discipline of apophasis that points us to the unfathomable nature of evil and the “unsayable” mystery of transcendent deity.

And, finally, the movement called antitheodicy argues that theodicies of any kind may actually desensitize us to the pain and anguish of others with such hollow and formalized arguments.

What we can say is that the theological effort to wrestle with evil, including horrendous evils, has a lengthy, variegated, and even convoluted history. What are the steps in that journey, and where has it taken us today?

This book escorts readers on this journey of more than two millennia and is guaranteed to lead to a few surprises. One of them is that a quest for an integral theodicy, a grand synthesis of the best insights of all prior views, may provide our best hope for a rational approach to the challenge of evil, sin, and the demonic. A second surprise is that we may find considerable support from a purported revelatory text that seems to address key theodicies of the past in ways that support such an integrative approach.

. . . . Today more sweeping formulations are needed in the aftermath of the rising threat of planetary ecocide and the continuing incidence of genocidal wars.

**Praise for *Truths about Evil, Sin, and the Demonic: Toward an Integral Theodicy for the Twenty-First Century***

“Belitsos offers a unique synthesis that combines an advanced theologically grounded discourse with a subtle discussion of the spiritual teachings of Christianity throughout its history. His argument finds its completion in the Christ-centered evolutionary panentheism of *The Urantia Book*, the integral metatheory of Ken Wilber, and postmodern apophatic theology. This book should find an easy pass to the heart and mind of any student of historical theology, philosophy, and spirituality.”

—Sergey Trostyanskiy, coeditor of *The Mystical Tradition of the Eastern Church*

“There is no greater theological challenge than the question—the perpetual crisis—of evil. And there is no more lucid and gracious an account of this problem of theodicy than Belitsos here offers. Both scholarly and general readers will find his historical exposition invaluable. He then invites us into the revelatory adventure, cosmically scaled and intimately relevant, of an answering integral vision.”

—Catherine Keller, professor of constructive theology, Drew University

“Belitsos offers a fresh and wonderfully insightful overview of theodicy—brilliantly done!—and explains a philosophy we would do well to learn more about from *The Urantia Book*. The questions about good and evil that Belitsos raises are the pressing ones of our time, and his book is a substantial and impressive contribution to addressing them.”

—Marcia Pally, author of *Commonwealth and Covenant*

“Evil is a problem for theists; it compounds the mystery of God. In a selective but accurate way—beginning with the book of Job—Belitsos highlights turning points in the history of theodicy. His approach is open and ecumenical. He leaves ample room for mystery and yet brings clarity that transcends the typical claim of an ‘impasse.’ This well-written and thorough theological treatise really touches on topics vital to every thinking Christian at some point in their lives.”

—Roger Haight, SJ, former president, Catholic Theological Society

“Belitsos constructs an integrative theodicy which unequivocally embraces the goodness of God. This good God guides us along the path of soul-making until all potentials have become actuals and any remaining trace of evil and sin have disappeared from the grand universe. This is a remarkably comprehensive and thoughtful update on the problem of evil.”

—Ted Peters, distinguished research professor of systematic theology and ethics, Graduate Theological Union

