

Postscript

We all want to make sense of life. But tragedies and evils—whether caused by free will, agency or random events—make it difficult to do so. The Boston Marathon bombing, a rock that accidentally killed a woman, a baby's acute debilitations, Zamuda's rape and her family's murder all need satisfying explanations. The answers most people give to God's role in these evils are unsatisfying. Believers in God want helpful answers to the biggest questions of life. In this book, I have offered answers that I find helpful.

In my work to provide satisfying answers, I have affirmed the reality of randomness and chance at various levels of existence. Scientists and philosophers rightly describe at least some events in the universe as random, in the sense of their not being entirely determined by anyone or anything. These events are not done on purpose, and no one intends them. No creaturely agent, factor or law controls these events, and neither does God. Randomness is real.

Lawlike regularities are also present in the cosmos. These lawlike regularities are the natural expressions or entailments of the all-embracing, all-sustaining and uncontrolling love of God. In fact, God's self-giving, others-empowering activity makes possible both regularity and randomness. God provides free will, agency, self-organization and spontaneity because God's love makes life possible. God's gifts and the ongoing flow of time mean that neither the creatures nor the Creator can foreknow with absolute certainty which possible events will someday become actual.

Most attempts to describe God's providence in the universe are not compelling. Some models present God as controlling; they at least say God could or occasionally does control. Some models deny genuine randomness. Some offer little explanatory consistency, which does not help us make sense of life. Some models of providence portray God as unaffected, impersonal and uninvolved, making it difficult to imagine how God lovingly relates to creatures. Some models deny that we can comprehend God in any way, which results in absolute mystery.

Open and relational theology is well suited to account for the randomness and regularities of our world. This approach to reality helps us make sense of our intuitions about free will, agency, self-organization, spontaneity and other causation. Open and relational theology supports the view that both genuinely good and genuinely evil events occur. And it argues that love resides at the center of the most satisfying answers to life's vexing questions.

Although many people intuitively believe love is uncontrolling, most theologians—even some open and relational theologians—have not considered kenotic love the logically preeminent attribute of God's nature. Instead, some think divine power precedes divine love. But placing sovereign choice before self-giving, others-empowering love prompts us to wonder why God doesn't occasionally control creatures to prevent genuine evils. When power logically precedes love, God could control others or situations if God wanted. We rightly wonder why the God capable of control does not, in the name of love, do so more often to prevent genuine evil.

I propose a model of providence I call essential kenosis. When describing this model, I draw from the broad themes of Christian Scripture, especially those pertaining to divine love, creaturely agency and the God-creation relationship. God's almighty love graces all creation all the time. Uncontrolling love is the mode by which divine providence operates because love logically comes first in God.

The distinguishing feature of essential kenosis is its claim that God cannot deny God's own nature of self-giving love. God necessarily

gives freedom, agency, self-organization or spontaneity to creatures. Because the divine nature is self-giving, others-empowering love and God “cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:13), God cannot withhold, override or fail to provide these gifts to creation. The Creator necessarily gives, and these gifts are irrevocable.

Essential kenosis solves both questions raised at the outset of this book. To the question of why a loving and almighty God does not prevent genuine evil, essential kenosis says God necessarily loves and consequently cannot prevent such evil. For God to prevent such evils unilaterally, God would have to deny himself, which cannot be done.

To the question of how God can be providential despite randomness, chance and luck in the world—especially those events with negative consequences—essential kenosis says God gives existence, including spontaneity, to all things. Random events are possible because of God’s existence-giving love. God cannot foreknow with certainty or prevent random events from generating negative consequences.

God’s gifts provide being to creatures in each moment, and God is ever active in giving and receiving relationship with each creature. Kenotic love empowers creatures to be and to act, and this love enables complex creatures to act freely. When creatures and creation respond well to God’s uncontrolling love, well-being is established. The kingdom of God is present. Love reigns in heaven and on earth. All that is good derives from God’s essential kenosis, which comes before and makes possible creaturely response.

The God that essential kenosis describes has plans and purposes. God invites, commands and empowers creatures to respond well to them, but God never controls creatures or situations. God does not operate from a foreordained or foreknown blueprint. Instead, God enables others. Creatures who cooperate work toward God’s good purposes.

The uncontrolling God of essential kenosis is faithful both to provide the regularities of existence and to enact miracles. Miracles are good and unusual events that involve God’s special action to provide beneficial forms of existence to the world. God does not su-

pernaturally intervene in, control or violate creation. But through God's persuasive love, both lawlike regularities and the special action in miracles express divine providence.

Essential kenosis offers an adventure model of reality. This model may strike some as a precarious paradigm of providence. Adventures aren't safe, after all, because they have general goals, not predetermined designs. Adventures involve calculated risks, free decisions and sometimes random occurrences. Love is an adventure without guaranteed results.

The adventure model of providence that essential kenosis offers, however, fits the world in which we live. Our world has genuine good and evil, randomness and regularity, freedom, agency, disappointments, and even miracles. It also fits a vision of a God who does not and cannot control others. If we read the Bible through the lens of God's self-giving, others-empowering, kenotic love, we will find that the essential kenosis model makes better sense of the broad biblical witness than do other alternatives. Essential kenosis helps us make sense of both the Bible and the world in which we live.

God's uncontrolling providence is an adventure of open and relational living. And in the logic of love, that makes sense.