

answer, in fact - is that He has done something about our human condition, and the pervasiveness of the effects of death and pain.

And He has done it - IN PERSON.

Religions offer plenty of answers to ethical problems (how can we “do good things”), but the traditional Christian understanding of God goes a step beyond this: God took on our sick and dying human flesh, entered death personally, and blew apart its permanent effects - because God cannot die. Although the world for the time being continues to suffer from the painful effects of the fall and death, the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ - His physical rising from the dead - offers us our real hope, in the short run, and in the long run:

- Instead of having to choose from all sorts of ineffective social, political, and personal solutions devised by the broken notions of the fallen world, God offers us a solution that originates outside the world's profound problems.
- More than just “believing in something higher than ourselves”, the lives of holy people offer us a path to follow to free ourselves from slavery to material possessions, and from the passions of greed, lust, pride, and hatred, to which we so easily resort for our false consolation. In the mystical tradition of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, this is called *asceticism*, the cutting off of thoughts and attachments. This traditional Christian asceticism goes a step farther, in that once we are disconnected from the fallen world, our

efforts are directed towards **becoming reunited with Christ**, in order to rely more and more on His strength, rather than our own.

- Instead of relying on simply having the right *beliefs* (which is a critical foundation, to be sure), or on doing “*good things*”, the ancient, authentic Christian path focuses on returning us to our true and original state - a state of holiness. Through a path of time-tested prayer, fasting, and repentance, one addresses the effects of the broken world on our individual lives: depression, addiction, obsessiveness, workaholism, and a lack of inner peace, to name a few things.

The answer to the question, *Why do bad things happen?*, can only be found by walking the centuries old path of experience of spiritually healthy, holy, and whole people, who have walked this path before us. For those who have the true desire and the will to seek lasting answers to this critical question, the concrete results that can show in day-to-day life are an answer worth looking for.

All Saints of North America
Orthodox Church

HAMILTON · ONTARIO · CANADA



If God is
Good
why do
BAD
things
happen?

Few things can be more troubling to a person of faith than disappointments or disasters. We can ask ourselves, If God is good, and if He loves us, why would *He allow* bad things to happen? Doesn't *He* have the power to stop disasters, disease, and death?

Many people offer what they might call a “Christian” perspective on this important question. With a thousand contradictory explanations, how can we hope to understand the truth on this essential question for our lives? Yet for the first one thousand years of Christianity, the great holy people of the

Church, the saints, martyrs, champions, bishops, and monastics, both men and women, offered one, unified explanation to this question of why bad things happen.

God's Purpose

As we read the lives and writings of these great saints, it soon becomes clear that they understood that when God created the world, He created it good - without suffering, without death. Along with that, God also created the human race free - not as robots, following some program. Why were we created with freedom? The earliest Christian writers tell us that if people are to be really holy, to be truly good, to truly love God, they must have freedom to choose.

This human freedom doesn't diminish God's power: He works with whatever we do, to bring about His will on earth. Some much later theories, such as reformed protestant teachings, argue that people are not really free to choose, and that God's control extends to every decision we make. This kind of teaching is at variance with that of the universal understanding of the early Church, and with Orthodox understanding to this day.

God is not powerful in the way a military dictator is powerful, through controlling people, and forcing them to do whatever he wants. Rather, God's far-seeing eyes, and His profound understanding of His creatures, allow Him to work with anything that

happens - even profoundly hurtful, troubling, and evil things - to bring about His plan for the world in general, and for us in particular.

At the Fall, mankind not only fell away from God, but our whole nature - body, soul, and mind - became radically changed. The great saints describe this state as "darkened", because our ideas and plans became distorted, and quite unlike the way they were at creation.

Personal Struggles

As a result, the human race was cut off from God, lonely, and continuing to long for something to fill the void that was once filled by God at the time of creation. Not wanting to leave a bad enough situation alone, the human race began devising a myriad of plans to fill the void: political ambitions, power struggles, entertainment, ambitions, distractions, and addictions. Modern materialism is the ultimate outgrowth of this search.

It should be no surprise that this foolhardy quest has resulted in more and more pain, as our hearts have become increasingly restless, and at the same time, have become attached to things that perish. This is the source of a great deal of pain in the world.

But how can we understand disasters, both personal and large-scale disasters, such as famines, plagues, and large-scale loss of life?

One of the main consequences of the fall

was the advent of death in the world. For most of us, death is such a commonplace thing that the notion that death was not part of existence from the beginning seems almost impossible. Yet this is precisely the understanding of Christian holy people and saints from the beginning. Most other religions recognize this reality, too, although they do not address the consequences of death in the same way.

Because death and related suffering (including sickness, fear, and the ambitions that result from fear) remain part of our fallen world, it should not surprise us that we feel discouraged by it all, and that we carry with us a profound sense that all this is terribly wrong, and fundamentally unnatural. Of course, it is.

It is a mistake to believe that anything from the broken, fallen world can somehow take away the pain and suffering that now afflicts us. Political programs have repeatedly tried, and failed. Social justice campaigns, health programs, and pleasure-seeking hedonism and materialism continue to suggest that they offer some lasting help, while experience shows them to be full of false promises.

So what is God doing about this?

Many people rightly ask the question:

If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He do something about this problem?

The answer - the only true and satisfying