

He gathered the waters of the sea as in a bottle;
 he put the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the LORD;
 let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.
 For he spoke, and it came to be;
 he commanded, and it stood firm. (Ps. 33:6–9)

A world under providence is one in which we recognize that nature truly belongs to God. The laws of nature are God's providential work just as miracles are.

More than Conquerors

The doctrine of providence raises questions about what God is up to when things go terribly wrong. Why would God, who is goodness and power, allow evil and suffering? This is the question addressed in **theodicy**, which tries to justify, or explain, God's actions in light of the existence of evil. There are many attempts, philosophical and theological, to address the problem of evil. Some describe evil as a teacher or emphasize ways God may use evil for some superior purpose. Some explain the existence of evil as a result of God's good choice to give true freedom to creatures, including the freedom to rebel against God's goodness. There is something of help in these strategies, but none will "solve" the problem of evil, and such strategies fall especially flat when they are depersonalized. No suffering person wants to hear trite clichés that bypass the depth of pain. This does not mean, however, that Christians have nothing else to say on the subject. For theologian Colin Gunton (1941–2003), evil cannot be "explained," but we do see, in God's providence, "something of the way in which its overcoming is begun and promised."¹⁶ Our response to evil, in faith, will not be a neat, logical solution but a living into the narrative of Scripture in which sin and death are *not* God's good intention for creation and in which evil is overcome through the work of Christ. The doctrine of creation makes it clear that God is not the author of evil. There is comfort in God's choice to be truly with us, to suffer with us and for us, and we live in confidence of God's final victory over sin, evil, and suffering.

Julian, with whom we began this chapter, was intimate with suffering. In her lifetime, she saw the plague sweep through her town twice, cutting great swaths of grief through Norwich. Amy Frykholm reflects on this: "Julian did not doubt the reality of sin. She could not deny the reality of suffering. . . . She carried from

16. Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 26.