

Wirksworth Team Ministry 2007-8

27 September 2007

Where is God in suffering?

Suffering

- Greek word: paschal
- Passive, being done to, being ministered to
- Physical suffering
- Mental suffering

Pain

- Does it have a purpose?
- Pain and pleasure?
- Love

Is suffering relative? an attitude of mind?

- What about healings?

Can God intervene?

- For whose sake do we wish the situation were otherwise?
- Why should God intervene?
- Should God
 - suspend natural law
 - divert the consequences of heredity
 - turn aside the effects of man's inhumanity to man?
- What about cause and effect?
- Is it all a matter of consequences
- Have we the right to expect God to save men from the consequences of human acts?
- What would this say about morality?

What does the Garden of Eden story represent?

- What consequences, if any, does this have?
- What about love if there were no suffering?

Is there an end, a purpose in suffering?

- Testing? 1 Peter 2:21-24
- A Divine Discipline? Hebrews 12:5-12; Proverbs 3:11-12.
- Partakers of the divine nature. 2 Peter 1:4. All things new"
- An Evil or a symptom?
- A Godly man's experience: Job.
- God's Working with Man: God working with humans for their own development? Bringing us to self-knowledge, and, for Job at least, intimate knowledge of God. ??

Does God Suffer?

- God Sent His Son. Hebrews 2:10-18. Hebrews 5:8
- What about your concept of God?

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THURSDAY 04 October 2007

Where is God in natural disasters?

(Really, this is suffering part 2)

What is a disaster?

- Is an event only a disaster if humans are affected?
- Are humans the only creatures on the planet that matter?
- If we humans choose to live close to a volcano, why should we complain when it erupts?
- Are we responsible for the consequences of our actions?
- Why should we complain when after a life of indolence and too much butter, we get heart disease? Should we expect the NHS to pay for our treatment? And what about all the diseases for which we know nothing about causation?
- What is the Garden of Eden story all about?

Creation

- Was the act of creation a once-and-for-all affair?
- Is creation a continuing process?
- Is the earth (the cosmos?) a living creature?

God

- Does God cause natural disasters?
- Do we project God onto natural events?
 - Israelites and the parting of the waters
- In the beginning was *logos*. *Logos* to ancient Greeks meant the system underlying all things, which could be taken as the laws of science.
- Are the laws of science part of God? equal to God? 'What is not God is nothing.'
- If so, what does that mean about natural events?
 - Ice age?
 - Global warming?
- 'God is working his purpose out year by year' – you say it, do you believe it?

Suffering: a reflection on last week, also relevant to this week

Suffering makes us more aware of ourselves, our weaknesses, our attitudes. Being more aware means that our inner divine cores start to peep through the masks that we choose to cloak them with. I'm not sure that we can make the spiritual journey without unmasking that inner core, at least a little. This is a step towards the kingdom of God, within us.

What do you think of this, from a website:

God has power and authority over the earth, so why does He allow all the destructive storms, plagues, and disasters? The answer to why we have natural disasters is found in the first few chapters of Genesis. God created everything perfect and beautiful. When Adam and Eve sinned He placed a curse on the earth and everything became broken and degraded. Although, the curse brought conflict, disease, and death, much of the original beauty can still be seen in God's creation. It continues to show His power, wisdom and design ability.

- Do we want a life without pain, without distress? Do we want to live for ever? Gulliver's Travels. Omelas. Utopia.
- Perhaps suffering makes us realize we are totally dependent: "Give us today our daily bread." If we had all we wanted, what would we be like? Would it be very boring? How could we love each other, show compassion? God is love.
- Do we *need* natural disasters/diseases/hardships in order to display our humanity?

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THURSDAY 11 October 2007

Where is God in war and cruelty?

What is peace?

Shalom, salvation, salaam, security. Niceness? Passivity? Ned Flanders? Doormat?

Just war

- Augustine (254-430)
 - war always a sin; if there must be war, it should be waged with sadness. But war could be remedy for sin and means of restoration of peace.
 - We do not seek peace in order to be at war, but we go to war that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace.
 - What about
 - Christ's call to be peacemakers?
 - Render to Caesar ... ?
 - Self defence? Defending the defenceless?
- Aquinas (1225-1274);
 - *The war must be started and controlled by the authority of state or ruler.* Rules out civil war and rebellion. What about tyrants?
 - *There must be a just cause.* So not greed, revenge or pride, but what about protection, self-defence and prevention of a worse evil.
 - *The war must be for good, or against evil.* Law and order must always be restored.
 - Two more rules were later added by the Catholic Church:
 - must be a last resort.
 - must be fought proportionally. No more force than necessary.

Ahimsa. Sanskrit - avoidance of *himsa*, violence. Violence leads to negative karma.

- Gandhi: preclusion of inflicting physical injury, also mental states like evil thoughts and hatred, unkind behaviour such as harsh words, and dishonesty and lying.
- Schweitzer thought this too negative, avoiding violence instead of emphasizing importance of positive action (helping injured).
- Jains hurt not even small insects and other minuscule animals. Malaria therapy? Bacteria? Antibiotics?
 - In their view injury caused by carelessness is like injury caused by deliberate action. Eating honey is outlawed: violence against bees. But violence in self-defence can be justified.

Nonviolence: Matthew 5:38-48. Overturning tables? Resistance

Thou shalt not kill – murder or manslaughter?

Be crafty for Christ: parable of unjust steward?

Sabaoth

Cruelty

- What is cruelty? Is it biological?
- Masochists like pain.
- Golden rule: neighbour as self.
- Abuse? How to define. Taking something away from someone else? What if with permission?
- Care for victim/offender.
- Punishment and forgiveness.

Repression: North Korea, Burma. Do we intervene?

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THURSDAY 18 October 2007

Where is God in sex and lust?

*We are not going to get through all this. Please be gentle with each other! There are no easy answers or opinions. These are my **questions**.*

We are made in the image of God.

- God looked at all he had made, and it was good. Natural desires must be good.
- Is anything not natural? Why should our view of natural be limited to opinions of those at a particular time in a particular region (they thought the earth was flat).
- Genesis: man and woman in the image of God. Is this the only model for Christian life?

Reproduction only?

- Prayer book marriage service. Testosterone.
- Is the RC policy on natural contraception coherent if sex is only for reproduction?
 - Is every sperm sacred? Is every ovum sacred? Potential for life begins when?

Eros, longing, not necessarily sexual.

- Urges, tendencies, addictions.
 - Can one be said to have a tendency if one doesn't express it?
 - Brain chemicals: reward dopamine.
- What is lust? Can it lead to love? Idolatry: not necessarily of objects.
- Yearning for God: Augustine. Primary ontological intentionality.
- Ecstasy. Visions.
- Holy communion: *admirabile commercium*, 'that we may dwell in him and he in us.'
- Sex as means of seeking God (tantric).
- Sex as a kind of at-one-ment. So theological interpretations of *Song of Songs*.
- Does God long for us as we for God? If so, what does this say about the nature of God?

Holy Scripture

- *Song of Songs*: erotic literature. What makes erotic literature more or less 'acceptable'?
- 1 Corinthians: to whom was Paul writing, and why?

Pleasure

- Intellectual pleasure
- Sexual pleasure, genital pleasure. Sex without reproduction. Masturbation: nocturnal emissions are natural. Logical consequences?
- Theology of pleasure. 'Without delight we are in hell.'
- Pleasure: self or mutual? Does this matter?
- Does *orgasm* have a purpose?
- Pain as pleasure: masochism.

Homosexuality

- Genetic sex, psychological sex.
- Intersex states.
- Compassion?
- Different rules for clergy and laity – why?

Miscellaneous

- Art, and art in churches. You can't say some of it's not sexual, or erotic.
- Is Christianity anti-male? Why do men 'hate' going to church?
- Why does it matter what people do with their genitals if nobody is exploited?

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THURSDAY 25 October 2007

Where is God in us?

Made in the image of God

- Genesis 1:26-27: 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness'.
- In the image of YHWH-God.
- God looked at all he had made, and it was good.

The kingdom of God

- First, seek the kingdom of God (rather than worry about tomorrow).
- Beatitudes: inherit the earth etc.
- Let your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven
- Now or end-times? Present reality r future manifestation, or present now and future manifestation?
- Luke 17:20-21 – the kingdom of God is *within you, or amongst you*? Does this matter?

So why do we sin?

- Life as a supermarket trolley: a tendency to chaos?
- Powerlessness. Romans 7:19.
- Sin as reversion to chaos = entropy (laws of thermodynamics). Christ provides the energy to prevent entropy.
- Born sinful? Original sin? A western thing? Romans 5:12. Based on faulty translation? If no original sin doctrine, it makes it worse, because then sin is deliberate.
- What/who is Satan?
- Why do we sin: did we fall? Not everyone thinks so. Perhaps we seek to rise.
- Does Eden represent the moments after creation? Or does Eden represent the moments before creation?
- Free will. We don't know everything, so how can we get everything right?

The inner light: God within

- Creation *ex nihilo*. from Godself, i.e. love?
- Love is sharing. God is sharing – Trinity represents sharing. God is community of love.
- The whole cosmos is God? 'What is not God is nothing' (Bulgakov).
- Paul's mirror in 2 Corinthians 3:18: *Changed from glory into glory* (Love divine: Wesley).
- Gregory of Nyssa tells us that grace restores the *image* and appropriates the *likeness* of God so far as possible in this life and in the next.
- Irenaeus: infant humanity has the natural capacity to grow into full maturity in God. 'God the Logos became what we are, in order that we may become what he himself is. ... The glory of God is a living person and the life of man is the vision of God.'
- Sorley; see over.
- Conscience? Other animals?

Can we mislay our humanity?

- Criminals. Are some people just evil? Nature/nurture?
- Amygdala: aggression. What about the neuroscience of evil?

This is the end of the weekly sessions. Thank you for coming.

- First WEDNESDAYS beginning 7 November (not January or February): *Jesus*
- First THURSDAYS in 2008: *Introduction to Holy Scripture*, beginning 3 January

Charles Hamilton Sorley 1895-1915

Expectans Expectavi

FROM morn to midnight, all day through,
I laugh and play as others do,
I sin and chatter, just the same
As others with a different name.

And all year long upon the stage,
I dance and tumble and do rage
So vehemently, I scarcely see
The inner and eternal me.

I have a temple I do not
Visit, a heart I have forgot,
A self that I have never met,
A secret shrine—and yet, and yet

This sanctuary of my soul
Unwitting I keep white and whole,
Unlatched and lit, if Thou should'st care
To enter or to tarry there.

With parted lips and outstretched hands
And listening ears Thy servant stands,
Call Thou early, call Thou late,
To Thy great service dedicate.

May, 1915