

## ENIGMA OF CREDULITY

An important series of books on Christian apologetics, The Christian View of the Bible, has a very interesting second volume. Entitled The Enigma of Evil it is a good read for those who wish to make an informed choice for or against Christianity. Its author is John Wenham.

The book attacks the position that God is not all-powerful and is forced to permit suffering by his lack of resources to fight it. This view is attacked on the grounds that this God who is not sovereign is not the God of Jesus Christ and the Bible. Decency would require the book to use philosophical arguments against this God but no. It uses the statements of a book, the Bible, on the assumption that the book is from God though you can't be sure of that until you are sure God could have written it and be like what it says. That's just plain old fundamentalist dogmatism.

The book then pompously assumes that it is no comfort to tell the parents of a child who has been tragically killed that it is not God's will but God could do nothing about it (page 30). There is no need for parents to believe in God to believe that some good can be made out of the situation. There is no comfort in the idea of a God when that God could allow anything to happen for his good purpose for who is to say that purpose will benefit the parents? How can one be comforted by the thought of the child being in a Heaven where happiness is like an injection from outside and the child is not supposed to care about it but God's will? How can a child be happy with a God who says that morality is about rules and not long-term happiness? Yarns about God's loving purpose are offensive to parents who have little or no belief in God for their feeling will be that the child should still be alive when they don't believe enough.

The book rejects the theory of the book by John Hick, Evil and the God of Love, which says that God gradually has worked on man through evolution and life to make man holy bit by bit and allows suffering as part of this sanctifying process (page 38). It says that this theory makes the fall excusable as part of the process of making people grow in holiness while the Bible sees it as an unmitigated disaster. Then this drivel rejects the view that the first man and woman had only a vague awareness of God that made their decision to sin understandable for Genesis says they had intimate intercourse with God meaning their happiness was complete. Another contradiction to Hick is that the Bible sees man as being more likely to sin than do good and as totally depraved. God did not make man to be good except perhaps the self-righteous "saved". I find Hick's theory objectionable from the point of view of decency. It means you can do evil believing that the damage is a good thing for people will improve in virtue from combating it. It means evil isn't so bad for God needs it to use it to make us holy. But the Bible one is ten times worse and more malicious and more obviously condones the evil ways of God. It says that Adam and Eve brought evil and punishment on us though we weren't even there. It condones the cruelty of God. It says that God set it up so that it would be a disaster for us if Adam and Eve sinned and yet that it is not his fault at all that we are in such trouble. Also, believers in the idea that Adam and Eve brought sin and suffering and punishment on themselves and on all their descendants still accept the idea that God uses evil to make us better people. They still need that excuse.

In the fourth chapter praises God that suffering follows sin like a kind of deterrent (page 45). But suffering cannot ever deter anybody from being evil only from practicing it. Because if you decline to do evil because of what might happen you are only worried about yourself and not about what is right and that is an evil attitude and still makes you evil. The book is just lying to make God seem like a good guy.

The book argues that few criminals want to be told that they could not help what they did (page 46). It says that to tell him he was programmed that way is to accuse him of being a lunatic. It is not. It is saying he is a normal person whose background caused what he did. The criminal does not want to hear it was not his fault if he believes in free will. We cannot say that free will exists just because some are conditioned and deceived into thinking it does.

At least the book states that retribution must also try to deter and reform for punishment should have three elements, retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation. It argues that if you just worry about one of the last two elements the result is that you could find the need to hurt a person more than you would need to if you had to limit yourself to what was fair and what the person deserved (page 48/9). You could hurt a person who stole for life in jail if you think you haven't succeeded in changing him or her. But this is just Christian scare-mongering. You cannot keep a person in jail just because they won't change for hurting them to change them more than the crime would seem to require would be a worse evil than unleashing them on the world to steal again. You don't even know if they will steal again even if they still would like to. Even if you believe in retribution and the person has paid his or her debt in jail for their crime you could insist that they be kept in jail longer if they haven't changed but not as punishment but as rehabilitation or deterrence. Suppose you believe in the need for rehabilitation. Then you cannot prove that hurting the criminal more than he or she deserves for the crime is bad. You could keep on giving suffering to them as you await their rehabilitation and reformation. This further suffering would not be punishment but treatment. There is nothing in the Christian theory of retribution that forbids such treatment.

Page 50 states that if you reject retribution you open the door to those who want to persecute minorities. It says that if a government seeing no use in a religion decided that it was a mental illness and disorder to follow that religion and enforced rehabilitation treatment on the members and locked them up in institutions then you cannot say it is wrong if you are against retribution. That is slander against those who rightly consider religion to be dependent on neurosis. I mean that even if we do consider religion to be an illness that does not mean we consider everybody who is religious to be in need of treatment. We all have mental disorders of one kind or another. It is only the severe cases that need to be taken into care. Besides we are discussing criminals - people who harm seriously - not people with neurosis and silly beliefs.

It is alleged that if you punish a person more than they deserve for the sake of deterrence the punishment will not have a deterrent effect on him or others for they will be angry (page 52). But that is because of the way society has been conditioned. And there will be many who will be deterred. Many people would be deterred for they don't want society to think that they pulled the worst on themselves by incorrigibility.

It is then asserted that the person who is told that his crimes were just the product of the programming his brain got through life will find little incentive to reform (page 53). This is an insult to the millions of law-abiding and courteous determinists who do not use the non-existence of free will as an excuse for being evil. We know that all people are psychologically determinists for they cannot prove that they have free will to themselves. How can you use free will if you cannot be sure you have it? Eyesight is no good to you if you believe that you don't see though you do. Then you are blind as much as a blind man is. You are not absorbing information taken in optically. Seeing is useless without belief.

The book then discusses the problem that it is so hard to work out what would be the fair punishment for anybody for being responsible is not about doing wrong acts and being accountable but about his character. A drunk is not to blame for the things he does when he is drunk but he is to blame for having got drunk knowing what it could lead to (page 54).

The book says cynically that if God had not acted to check original sin a bit then the whole world would be a hellhole (page 56). It says that suffering is often caused to follow sin for the purpose of keeping some measure of control over us. No Christian can subscribe to this view because it implies that God does not need to make us free to do what Hitler did and it accuses God of giving us too much freedom and of being wrong in doing so. The Christian has to regret that suffering deters on the grounds that freedom to sin or love comes first. Suffering following sin often makes people afraid to sin again - it makes them turn away from sin more to avoid displeasure than to be good. is saying that without suffering the world would be worse because of original sin. He invents the idea of original sin like all Christians have done with him and then to sustain that invention of his and theirs human suffering has to be condoned and blessed by him and them.

It is not original sin that makes people bad. We are born with minds that are clean slates and which are progressively corrupted by those around us unless we learn to arrest that filthy pollution. It is irrational thinking and belief that corrupts the mind and produces evil for evil is irrationality. The doctrine of original sin leads to the attitude, "Let us not try too hard to make people sensible for their innate sinfulness makes success only too limited". The sheer evil of the Christian doctrinal system is nauseating. Only the Devil could give the grace to be a committed believing Christian. In fairness, there are other religions which are no better.

Then the book says that God is often slow to punish after sin. He takes his time so that the sinner might repent for the sinner would repent for the wrong reason, selfishness, if punishment followed sin too closely all the time (page 61). The sinners would avoid sin to avoid pain and not because sin was offensive to God. But to avoid sin because of punishment is not to avoid sin at all. It is to harbour sinful attitudes in one's heart which one is afraid to put into practice but would given the right circumstances. For example, if there was no threat of punishment the person would sin. To do that is sneakier than sinning openly for it is sinning with less chance of paying for it in any way. So instant punishment would not stop sin at all but delayed punishment makes it more likely and more serious. The book says another reason God delays the punishment is to give the Christians a chance to make sure they want the person punished for the right motives. They have to want them punished to please God which means approving of God taking his time and not for the satisfaction of their own crave to see vengeance visited.

The book says that Adam was us when he sinned so that is how we sinned in Adam and insists that the answer to the problem of the innocents suffering is that there are no innocents (page 64). It says we are guilty of Adam's sin because we feel guilty. But we can feel guilty for what is not wrong at all and we do not feel responsible for Adam's sin.

The book callously insults those who have been tortured for weeks and even months by alleging that since Jesus shared our joys and sorrows to the utmost nobody can suffer more than he did on the cross (page 66). The book suggests that God kindly has arranged it that if we receive too much suffering we pass out. Come to think of it, why then did Jesus not pass out but was supposedly conscious all the time until he died?

It is interesting that the book thinks that official orthodox theology was born in 553 AD at the Second Council of Constantinople (page 69).

The book rejects the traditional doctrine of Hell or everlasting torture. That is the only time any humanity appears in it. But the fact remains that nothing in the Bible refutes the doctrine. The book arbitrarily assumes that the passages in Revelation that make eternal punishing clear are being symbolic and just because it chooses to take the references to everlasting death literally though death is used non-literally many times in the Bible. The safe side alone would suggest that Hell be taken literally.

Despite being written about the problem of evil in the world and in the Bible the book says that it is not our business to justify the ways of God (page 102). So we have no right to know why we suffer. If that is true then we cannot have any rights at all and whoever treats us well is sinning. The enlightened person would be put off loving God reading this vicious tripe. But vicious as it is it is what believers in God are forced to say if they want their belief in God.

It is admitted that the prophet Jeremiah lied for the sake of obeying a king (page 107). How God could choose a man who would lie as a prophet is not explained. God said in Deuteronomy 18 that a prophet had to say only perfectly right things to be a true prophet and once he made a mistake he was to be totally rejected as inspired by God even if 999 out of a thousand things he said are right or plausible. This obviously says that you should not follow any prophet until you know everything about him and are totally sure he is reliable. You don't follow him until you find he makes a blunder. You follow him after he is dead when you are sure his work is done and is perfect (another reason why Jesus Christ as portrayed in the gospels cannot be considered a real prophet or messenger of God). When you have to be that sure that God has spoken how can you be allowed to follow a prophet you have caught out in a needless lie even if his lie was not claimed to have been endorsed by God?

I give the book some credit. It says that Paul permitted anger but decreed that it had to be without sin and it admits that sinless anger may be an emotion that is never felt but which is certainly extremely rare if it is (page 183). This puts the Christian lie that we can love the sinner and hate the sin to rest. We are told later that this lie is the truth and only God can make me love those whose sins I hate (page 187). But perhaps there is no contradiction intended for it may be thought that God will only succeed after we die for it is so hard for us. In reality, the contradiction is there and cannot be solved. Considering how intensely Christianity feels against sin it is clear that to call upon people to loath sin is asking them to feel the same way about the sinners.

The statement that Jesus was moved to tears by the compassion he felt for people with problems (page 194) is offensive to atheist ears for the following reason. If Jesus were God then how God could feel sorry for people whose lives he organised in such a way as to cause all these problems is impossible to explain. God could have put us on a nice planet that never lets the population go beyond a thousand in which it would be easier to be good and there would be less bad example.

The book says that when a person tortures an animal the worst damage is probably done to the tormentor and not the animal (page 214) the implication being that it is not such a big deal that the animal is hurt. In other words, the tormentor ruins his own soul by enjoying such evil and corrupts himself. But if the tormentor repents this will not happen. So the Christian cannot condemn him for hurting the animal as much as for his damaging himself. But if he can prevent damage by repenting then it is not damaging that is wrong and immoral but not repenting. Christians are making the torment of animals out to be a tolerable and minor wrong in which case it is impossible to see how anybody maltreating animals could damage themselves in any important way.

Presumably the closeted heretic only damages himself too. But religion still says that heresy is a dreadful sin on its own apart from not repenting of heresy. So if you are a heretic for ten harmless seconds it is still a major offence. I am tired of the nonsense that Christians foist on the unsuspecting world.

The purpose of the book trying to minimise the crime of hurting an animal is because it hopes to rescue God from the accusation of cruelty when he made animal to slaughter and torment and kill animal for food and for pleasure. We are told it is a good thing when herds kill the sick among them. But most herds do not need to get the sick off their backs. If sick animals are burdens then sick humans must be burdens too. The God belief implies that such thinking is true and a duty for we must praise him in all things.

It is shocking that believers in God have to believe that animal pain is not that bad to get God off the hook. What right have they to believe that when they don't know what it is like? They open the way to people who wish to say that the people who seem to suffer horrendously don't really but are putting it on. They open the way to making people unaware of how much harm their cruel deeds can do. But people don't matter – only God does.

The book shows that the Christian faith even when it tries to be nice fails miserably. The book is a disgrace.

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