



In preparation for our evening together, I have put together four thought-provoking sources for your consideration.

Remember last time that we talked about the difficulties in bringing others to Christ and then made a “Top 10” that would serve as the “red thread” for at least some of our future Christian Men's meetings. These readings are meant to get you to think about the problem of ***Evil and Suffering*** in the world as an impediment to belief in Jesus Christ.

Before we start, please get a person in your thoughts – perhaps it is a person you know who has questions about this subject; perhaps it is a person you know at work or are trying to bring to Christ, perhaps that person is yourself. At any rate, try to relate what you are about to hear to a person – or at least a situation – so that it isn't too abstract.

The first reading is from C.S. Lewis' introductory chapter of “The Problem of Pain”. Lewis was recounting how he felt about the issues of Suffering and Pain when he was still an atheist. Please remember that this was written in 1940:

“The [human] race is doomed. Every race that comes into being in any part of the universe is doomed; for the universe, they tell us, is running down, and will sometime be a uniform infinity of homogeneous matter at a low temperature. All stories will come to nothing: all life will turn out in the end to have been a transitory and senseless contortion upon the idiotic face of infinite matter. If you ask me to believe that this is the work of a benevolent and omnipotent spirit, I reply that all the evidence points in the opposite direction. Either there is no spirit behind the universe, or else a spirit indifferent to good and evil, or else an evil spirit.”

C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

The second thought-starter is from Epicurus who could be characterized as the Father of Materialism or Naturalism and not a Greek thinker who had much time for God:

*“Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not all-powerful.
Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.
Is he both able and willing? Then why all this evil?
Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?”*

Many would say that Epicurus' questions have yet to be adequately answered more than 2000 years later.

Our third reading comes from the most famous of the New Atheists, Professor Richard Dawkins and his book, *River out of Eden*:

“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.... [He goes on to say]....DNA neither knows or cares, DNA just is and we dance to its music.”

And our final reading from Sir Robert Anderson and his book, *The Silence of God*:

“In no place in the region has the attack upon the Christians been more savage than in Egin. Every male above twelve years of age who could be found was slain. Only one [young man] was found who had been seen and spared. Many children and boys were laid on their backs and their necks cut like sheep. The women and children were gathered together in the yard of the [local government] building and in various places throughout the town. [Muslim] soldiers went among these women, selected most beautiful, and led them aside to rape them. In the village of Pinguan fifteen women threw themselves into the river to escape dishonor.” The Times newspaper, December 10th.

Sir Anderson continues: For 19 centuries the world has never witnessed a public manifestation of God's presence or His power. Why should God be so cruel? Why is Heaven so terribly silent?”

If that sounds very modern, it isn't: it is from the The London Times of 1896 during the Turkish massacre of Armenian Christians and it is eerily similar to what we see today.

Two of these readings are from atheists: Epicurus and Dawkins
Two of these readings are from strong Christians: Lewis and Anderson

It represents very contemporary attitudes and situations of great suffering and unmistakable evil.

What we need to get out of these readings is this: how do we answer this question when it comes from someone who has inquiries about Christianity, morality, good, and evil? Indeed, how do we answer our own questions concerning these troubling issues?

Thank you for taking the time to prepare and I look forward to seeing you at our next meeting. (23 January at 18:00 at Treekerweg 2A in Leusden)