

## DARWINIAN EVOLUTION – THE REALLY HARD QUESTIONS

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SLIDE. Anyone here who has had the pleasure, as I've often had, of talking about evolution to church or student groups, will be very familiar with the first few questions that nearly always dominate the question and answer time once you've said your piece.

SLIDE. And these revolve around two central theological and philosophical problems that many Christians have with Darwinian evolution. The first is the huge amount of death and suffering that is intrinsic to the evolutionary process, which some feel is incompatible with the idea of God's creation being declared good in Genesis Ch 1. The second is the question of how the Genesis teaching about Adam and Eve relates to the evolutionary account of the origins of humankind and in turn how this relates to the doctrine of the Fall. And all I can hope to do in such a short time is to flag up some positions and pointers which I hope might be helpful for further discussion.

SLIDE. Three introductory points. First, I think it's incredibly important that we do full justice to both the theology and the science. In this kind of discussion there is always a danger that we will make our theology more anaemic for the purpose of accommodating the science, or that we'll down-play some well-established, solid science in order to make our theology more palatable. Some Christians have a habit of making up the science to fit their apologetics. That's not good enough. Integrity demands an equally robust stance towards both the science and the theology.

Second CLICK, in practice that means that we have to get used to not knowing the final answers to some issues, which is clearly the case here, and yet at the same time doing the best we can in building sensible models that integrate both the science and the theology. And we need to discuss those models tentatively, because there simply aren't enough data to be too sure.

And CLICK third, I take it that our responsibility both as scientists and as Christians in science is to describe to the best of our ability what God has actually done in the created order, and not to construct rationalistic systems of theology in which God must have done things in a certain way. SLIDE. As G. K. Chesterton once put it: "Whenever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find there is something odd in the truth."

SLIDE. What about human death in the Bible? The Bible knows of three types of death: physical death; spiritual death here and now; and eternal spiritual death. First, physical death. As you work through all the passages about death in the OT, the first thing that strikes you is how earthy and matter of fact the OT is about death. You have your allotted span on earth and then you depart to *sheol*. Sin is not linked to physical death per se, but to early death, or to death as punishment, or death as animal sacrifice. Death is God's decision. As Hannah gave thanks to God at Shiloh for her newborn, she prayed "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up" (1Sam. 2:6).

SLIDE. When you come to the NT it's the difference between walking in a wood by moonlight and then the same wood the next day in bright sunlight: the contrasts now look much more stark. With the preaching and practices of the kingdom of God, physical death looks more like an enemy to be overcome. Jesus raises the dead. Jesus weeps at the tomb of Lazarus. "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" writes Paul (in 1 Cor 15:26). But at the same time the hope of resurrection is always dominant: physical death for the believer in the NT is never something to be feared. (Heb. 2:15) Jesus has come to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death".

SLIDE. Contrast this now with spiritual death, an idea that appears in the OT in embryo but is rampant in the NT. Paul's whole exposition of sin and the law in Romans centres around spiritual death, separation from God: Rom 7.11 "For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death". But (Rom. 8:2) "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death". Believers are those "who have been brought from death to life" says Paul (in Romans 6:13). The blackness of spiritual death in the NT is always contrasted with the possibility of repentance and faith leading to life in Christ.

SLIDE. But there's a third type of death introduced to us in the NT, and that's the spiritual death that continues on after this life, the permanent death that is sometimes called the 'second death'. Jesus speaks of it in Matt. 10:28: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell". But the actual phrase 'second death' only appears in the book of Revelation where it occurs four times. Those early suffering churches in Asia-Minor are reassured by the words of Jesus: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be

hurt at all by the second death” Rev. 2:11. Then finally in Rev. 20:14 we learn that death itself is “thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death”. The Grim Reaper itself is ushered out of the drama even as the new heavens and the new earth are ushered in.

So that’s death in the Bible in a very small nutshell. Physical death is temporary and not to be feared. Spiritual death, separation from God, is to be put right by repentance and faith in Christ, leading to the assurance of resurrection to eternal life. The only death to be really scared of is the second death, but Christ frees us from that fear as we put our trust in Him.

SLIDE. What about death in evolutionary biology? The facts are so well known that they barely need review here. Biology is a package deal. Once you have the key elements for life, synthesised in the dying moments of exploding stars, then this is the package you’re likely to get given this planetary environment. And this means that virtually any plus that you care to mention – something that we as humans see as positive for our life and well-being, is going to have an inevitable minus, something that is deleterious to our well-being. And so we can construct a vast Table, of which the examples shown here are just a tiny sample of all the examples that could be given.

SLIDE. Carbon-based life is of course impossible without death. No multicellular animal can live by deriving all its energy needs from chemical elements, all are completely dependent on the food-chain whereby organic molecules synthesised in other organisms are passed on to them. And we sometimes forget the massive scale of biological death on our planet. CLICK. We have 10-fold more bacteria in our bodies than we do our own cells, but that’s as nothing compared to the estimated  $5 \times 10^{30}$  bacteria in the world, more than 92% living underground and weighing roughly equivalent to all the plants in the world. That’s certainly a lot more than the  $10^{22}$  stars in the universe and it involves a huge amount of daily death. And if you don’t care very much about bacterial death, then think of the extinction of the 99% of species that ever lived and the sheer scale of death that is intrinsic to the evolutionary process. CLICK. Or think of the roughly 155,000 human deaths every day or nearly 108 every minute. If you stacked the number of human bodies that die every day on top of each other then the pile would stretch nearly 30 miles into the sky. That’s every day.

So we’re living in an incredibly dynamic world in which there is a huge amount of daily coming and going. The dead of all kinds are constantly making room for the living. And everything depends on everything else.

SLIDE. Pain is an essential property of biological life, especially as nervous systems become more developed. Feeling pain is an inevitable consequence of sentience. Therefore brain complexity, awareness of the environment and experience of pain appear to increase in parallel. As Holmes Rolston remarks: the evolutionary process “could be titled, perversely, ‘The Evolution of Suffering’”. Yet clearly pain for us, as for all living organisms, is essential for survival. Without pain we would be walking around on broken legs and munching on broken glass with rotting teeth. In short, our lives would be considerably briefer than they are at present.

SLIDE. Recently a dramatic illustration of this fact was published in Nature (14 Dec 2006). Individuals were described from three different Pakistani families with a complete inability to feel pain due to mutations in a particular sodium channel. The index case was a child who performed ‘street theatre’. He placed knives through his arms and walked on burning coals but experienced no pain. He died before his 14<sup>th</sup> birthday by jumping off a house roof. All this because of a single point mutation in the gene encoding one of his ten different types of sodium channel.

SLIDE. But of course mutations are essential for our evolutionary history and for our diversity. Without mutations we wouldn’t be here because there would have been no diversity upon which natural selection would have acted. And without genetic variation between us, we would all be clonal, looking identical. But it is that same variation which causes genetic diseases or cancers - necessary costs of living in a carbon-based life world.

SLIDE. A few months go the results were published from the first large-scale study aimed at discovering cancerous mutations in a specific collection of genes that encode a class of enzymes called kinases. 518 kinase-encoding genes were analysed from 210 different cancers, identifying 1000 mutations of which 158 were identified as actual drivers of carcinogenesis.

CLICK. In anthropic accounts of the fine-tuning of the physical constants of the universe, we often hear of Fred Hoyle’s discovery of the precise resonances in carbon that facilitate its synthesis from helium via beryllium. Without this particular resonance no carbon would have been made in the stars and we would not be here. But arguably not only carbon based life, but also carbon-based pain, suffering, disease and death are written into that same anthropic script. Biology really is a package deal. Physical death is part of the deal.

SLIDE. So how do we fit that with the repeated statement in Genesis Chapter I that God declares his pristine creation ‘good’? Before considering that further, let us turn our attention to the Biblical teaching about Adam and Eve and the Fall, and in this discussion I accept fully the kind of handling of the Genesis text that Ernest has surveyed for us so helpfully. What you believe about the Adam and Eve narrative will of course strongly

influence what you think about the Fall and vice-versa. The discussion is not made easier by the well-known fact that the Genesis account uses the term Adam in three different albeit related ways. The first usage in Gen. 1:26 is clearly humankind – it is Adam, humankind, “male and female he created them”, who are made in God’s image. The second usage is ‘the Adam’, the man, with the definite article, as in Gen 2:7 when God forms Adam ‘the man’ out of the *adama*, the ground. Personal names in Hebrew do not carry the definite article. And the definite article is firmly attached to Adam until we reach 4:25 when Adam without a definite article appears and “lay with his wife again”. So what we find in these chapters is a subtle and surely deliberate weaving of theological teaching about the status and purpose of humankind, together with a dramatic account of their disobedience to God’s commands and its consequences.

SLIDE. As far as the evolutionary account of human origins is concerned, the general outline is pretty clear. Our common descent from the apes is about as certain as anything you can find in biology. The signatures of our evolutionary past are indelibly inscribed within our genomes. We are all walking genetic fossil museums, with some 45% of our DNA comprising transposable elements, including many copies of endogenous retroviruses, which have been integrated into our genomes as permanent passengers, providing irrefutable evidence for our common descent from the apes. SLIDE. Our genomes are littered with pseudogenes, genes used by our ancestors, but now fallen into disuse; for example our chromosome 7 encodes 1,150 genes, but also 941 pseudogenes, sitting there like molecular fossils of our evolutionary past.

SLIDE. Our immediate ancestors appear to have been the so-called archaic *Homo sapiens* who emerged in Africa around half a million years ago who rapidly spread across the continent and into the Near East and Europe, displacing the populations of *Homo erectus* that had previously lived there. The oldest well-characterised fossils of anatomically modern humans come from the Kibish formation in S. Ethiopia and their estimated date is 195,000 +/- 5,000 years old (as published in McDougall, I. et al Nature 433: 733-736 2005).

SLIDE. Genetic clock data supports an emergence of anatomically modern humans in Africa during the period 100,000-200,000 years ago, who then spread across the world from around 70,000 years ago, reaching Australia by 60,000 years ago and back-tracking into Europe by 40,000 years ago. By 15,000 years ago they were trickling down into N. America across the Bering Strait.

And all we know about speciation suggests that the emergence of anatomically modern humans was a relatively gradual process which took tens of thousands of years, most likely occurring in an isolated and relatively small population. Unlike plants which can speciate overnight by the simple expedient of chromosomal doubling, we vertebrates take a little longer.

SLIDE. So how, then, do we understand the Fall and the Adam & Eve narratives in conversation with our current understanding of human evolution? Of course some would say that the conversation shouldn’t even be attempted – it’s like comparing anthropological apples with theological oranges. But the fact remains that at some stage over the past few hundred thousand years anatomically modern humans gradually emerged, and it’s also a fact that personal knowledge of God must have started sometime when it wasn’t there before. So for those interested in integrating their science with their faith, it seems a reasonable exercise to at least construct some models to envisage how these two narratives might relate to each other. This is not a concordist exercise in which we are seeking to impose scientific meanings on to a theological text, more like a conversation between two disciplines. Here we have a theological narrative and a scientific narrative, both undoubtedly true – is there any relationship between the two or not?

SLIDE. And there are at least five main views to answer that question, three compatible with this evolutionary account, which I will call Models A-C, and two incompatible, Models D & E, each Model with many sub-variations:

Model A is the ahistorical view. In this Model the story of the Fall has no intention to be historical in any sense but is the eternal story of Everyman. It is a theological narrative that describes the common human experience of alienation from God through disobedience to God’s commands. Every person repeats the story in their own experience as they fall short of what God expects of them. It is a story that highlights the fact of spiritual death that characterises humankind. In this ahistorical view, therefore, talk of evolutionary biology is irrelevant, and so the Model simply kicks the ball into touch or, if you’re from the other side of the big pond, the ball is kicked or thrown out of bounds by the quarterback.

SLIDE. Model B is a gradualist protohistorical view which suggests that as anatomically modern humans evolved in Africa 200,000 years ago, or during some period of linguistic and cultural evolution since then, there was a gradual growing awareness of God’s presence and calling upon their lives, but this awareness was consciously rejected in favour of choosing their own way rather than God’s way. In Model B, therefore, the Fall is a process happening over a long period of time, leading to spiritual death.

SLIDE. Model C is a further protohistorical view, but moving now more in the direction of the Fall as a specific event in time and history. In this view God in His grace chose a couple of Neolithic farmers in the

Near East, or maybe a community of farmers, to whom He chose to reveal Himself in a special way, calling them into fellowship with Himself - so that they might know Him as a personal God. It's not that there were no settled farmers beforehand, but from now on there would be a community who would know that they were called to a holy enterprise, called to be stewards of God's creation. It is for this reason that this first couple, or community, have been termed *Homo divinus*, the divine humans, those who know the one true God, the Adam and Eve of the Genesis account. The image of God therefore speaks of fellowship with God with all the attendant responsibilities that come with that. Being an anatomically modern human was necessary but not sufficient for being spiritually alive, then as indeed now remains the case. So the Fall in Model C becomes the disobedience of Adam and Eve to the expressed revealed will of God, bringing spiritual death in its wake. And in an extension of this Model, just as Adam is the Federal Head of humankind, God graciously bestowing his image upon his collaterals, so as Adam falls, equally humankind falls with him. Federal Headship works both ways.

SLIDE. Model D includes that cluster of views often associated with Old Earth Creationism or Episodic Creationism in which God intervenes in special ways at various times during the creative process, and particularly in the miraculous physical creation of Adam and Eve who then disobey God. So Model D is usually associated with a denial of human evolution, although many people holding this Model would see plant and animal death and predation entering the world well before the Fall, with Adam and Eve being preserved from physical death prior to their disobedience.

SLIDE. Model E takes this one step further in the view espoused in Young Earth Creationism in which the whole evolutionary process is denied. In this view there was no death of any kind, physical or spiritual, until the Fall took place.

Now today I want us to focus our attention on Models A-C because these are the ones that take the science as seriously as they do the theology. For myself I have to confess that I tend to hold to Model A on Mondays, Model B on Tuesdays, but Model C for the rest of the week – let's never hold to any one of them more than lightly. SLIDE. But it's important to notice from the Genesis account of the Fall, together with its interpretation in the rest of Scripture, that it is spiritual death which is its immediate consequence:

\* In the command given to Adam in Gen. 2: 17, God warns "But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day [yom] that you eat of it you will surely die". But Adam and Eve did not drop dead physically after their disobedience in Gen Ch 3 but went on to live a long life and have lots of children. Yet no more vivid description of spiritual death, of alienation from God, can be found in Scripture than the one we find in Genesis Ch 3, as Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden. In place of warm fellowship with God we have all the classic signs of spiritual death: shame, fear, blame, alienation and separation from the Tree of Life. And of course that spiritual death has a huge negative impact on humankind's function as God's earth-keepers.

- So the Fall narrative in Genesis 3 is about broken fellowship with God. It's not firstly about anti-social behaviour, or about the inability of people to live in harmony, important as such things are. Rather in this context sin involves a broken relationship with God. And you can't break a relationship unless you first have one.

- SLIDE. And it's certainly fascinating to see how the Fall narrative is treated in the rest of the Bible. Ezekiel's use of the narrative is to prophecy against the arrogant King of Tyre, picturing his exclusion from Eden in Ezekiel 28. Truly, pride comes before a Fall.

- SLIDE. But it's the New Testament that highlights for us most robustly the spiritual death entailed by the Fall narrative, most famously of course by Paul. The Pauline passages are certainly consistent with the idea that Adam's disobedience brings in spiritual death. 1 Cor 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive". Rom. 5:15: "For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" When we become a Christian, when we come to be in Christ, then we experience a spiritual new birth, not a physical re-birth, as Jesus had to explain to Nicodemus in John Ch. 3. Jesus gives constant warnings in the Gospels against taking His words physically and missing their internal spiritual meaning. Today in the Biblical picture all humankind are either in Adam, or they are in Christ. Anatomically and genetically they are the same. But spiritually there is a huge difference, the difference between life and death. It was ever so, as much in Genesis chapter 3 as it is today. And so as we are in Christ we have that great hope of future resurrection and deliverance from the second death. "Oh death where is your sting, oh grave where is your victory?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

Now I mentioned earlier that I held to Model A on Mondays, Model B on Tuesdays and Model C for the rest of the week, and since today is a Saturday I thought I should just list the four points that I find personally tips the balance for me cautiously in favour of Model C:

1. It includes Model A – of course the account is also the story of Everyman. We are all by nature in Adam, fallen short of the glory of God.
2. But Model C seems to fit better with the NT focus on Christ as the second Adam, a real historical person. SLIDE. The first Adam is the Federal Head of humankind. The Second Adam, Christ, is the Federal Head, not the biological Head, of the new humanity. There are other examples in Scripture where a parable or figurative language is used to make powerful points about real people. Think of Nathan's moving parable to King David about his adultery in 2 Sam Ch 12.
3. SLIDE. And perhaps Model C also fits better with the Neolithic type culture painted for us in the early chapters of Genesis with its assumption of other cities and people around who were not apparently in the 'Godly line'. As a bonus the Model explains the old chestnut of where Cain got his wife from, and why he was afraid of being murdered as he wandered the earth in Gen. 4:14.
4. CLICK. I'm also attracted to Model C because of its focus on the interactions of the personal God of the Bible with specific individuals – and that's the Biblical pattern all the way through – God revealing Himself by grace to people with names.

Now irrespective of your views within the range of Models A-D, at least, you certainly have to face the question with which we started: how can God repeatedly state that His created order is 'good' in Genesis Chapter 1 when we know that God's good creation involves a long evolutionary process in which death and predation are integral components? And of course the discussion here revolves around what we understand by the term 'good' in this context.

SLIDE. The Hebrew word for good (*tob*), used 7 times in Genesis Ch 1, is used in the OT text with all the range of meanings that we find also for the word in English, and so as in English we can only determine its meaning by its context. Ernest Lucas has helpfully summarised the various nuances of the word 'good' as found in OT Hebrew.

It can refer to:

1. that which is pleasing to the senses, both physical and intellectual. (In this sense it refers to aesthetic beauty).
2. that which is good of its kind.
3. that which is usable, effective, efficient, in other words 'fit for purpose'. [This seems to be a development of meaning (2)].
4. a quality of human character, which in many cases seems to be 'kindness' or 'friendliness'. [This, too, can be seen as a development of meaning (2)].
5. that which is morally good. This is, in fact, a relatively uncommon use of the adjective.

So in Genesis Ch 1 the word 'good' to describe God's creative handiwork can be interpreted with several of these nuances. Aesthetically good and pleasing to the eye – certainly. A good day's work done by the heavenly creator – without doubt. Fit for purpose? That does seem to be the main nuance in this Chapter according to Gordon Wenham. For God did not create the new heavens and the new earth when he made the present cosmos, but instead the one we actually observe. Neither did he create Superman when he created Adam, but instead made humankind from the dust of the earth and gave them a tough job in a tough world, to subdue the earth, and care for it, with all its wild animals - a huge responsibility. So we should be careful not to imagine the pre-fallen world as if it were already the new earth that God has planned for the redeemed, where there will be no more death or suffering - this would be a kind of reverse eschatology. Instead the present world was created as a good world, fit for God's plan and purposes, looking forward to another good world to come, which will be good in a different sense.

SLIDE. Which of course leads us on to the various stances that writers have taken on the theodicy question in the light of the death and suffering involved in the evolutionary process. The term theodicy refers to all those attempts to explain how a good and all-powerful God could create a world with suffering and evil in it, so-called 'natural evil'.

SLIDE. In this context I would first want to echo very much the words of Paul Fiddes when he writes "that no argument finally convinces. We cannot rationalise God, or fully explain suffering and evil". Yet neither does that mean, of course, that we need to remain completely silent on the question.

SLIDE. A few brief thoughts. The theodicy discussion in the context of the evolutionary process largely centres round different understandings of God's omnipotence. There is a spectrum of views leading from the *laissez-faire* God at the left pole through to the totally controlling God at the right pole. CLICK. So towards the left we have those process theologians who suggest that the evils of the world are explained by God's non-omnipotence. CLICK. Further to the right we have those writers who suggest that God has deliberately chosen to restrict His omnipotence in order to allow the created order to be itself and in a sense express its own 'freedom'. CLICK. The theologian Jack Haught, for example focuses particularly on the theological notion of

'kenosis', of God letting the creation be itself out of love "willing to risk the disorder and deviation that actually occur in the evolution of cosmic beauty". The perceived advantage for constructing a coherent theodicy is of course that now God is no longer directly responsible for the ills of the created order, but instead its "disorder and deviation" to use Jack Haught's phrase is a consequence of giving creation its freedom to develop.

CLICK. Further to the right we have more robust expressions of God's omnipotence that highlight His faithfulness in both creating and sustaining the properties of matter, properties which as a matter of fact do perfectly fulfil His intentions and purposes. There is therefore no room in this view for kenosis in the context of God's creative work, because God is in no sense denying His own nature in the creative process. CLICK. So Colin Gunton states "that there is no suggestion in the Bible that the act of creation is anything but the joyful giving of reality to the other".

SLIDE. And we are reminded, too, of Austin Farrer's vivid words: "Poor, limping world, why does not your kind Creator pull the thorn out of your paw? But what sort of a thorn is this? And if it were pulled out, how much of the paw would remain? How much, indeed, of the creation? What would a physical universe be like from which all mutual interference of systems was removed? It would be no physical universe at all".

SLIDE. Which brings us more to the right in this spectrum, where God has set intentions and purposes for the world that are being and will be fulfilled through the created order, John Hick's 'vale of soul-making'. In this account, God created a tough world, a world which had, and has, to be subdued by humans made in his image. It is a world in which there is pain and death and plenty of challenges to our comfort and well-being. In a word, it is a world in which moral and spiritual growth is made possible, more like a Boot Camp than a Vacation Camp. It is certainly not a world in which anyone can afford to feel overly comfortable or complacent. It is a world in which dependency upon God's grace is the only safe option. But God is preparing a new heavens and a new earth where there will be no more pain or suffering, and ultimately the whole of the created order will be redeemed and its best aspects will be brought into the fulfilled kingdom of God. New here is the Greek *kaine* which means 'new in quality', not *neos*, which means 'not having existed before'.

SLIDE. And it is, I think, this tension of the present evil age with the age which is to come - the fulfilled Kingdom of God - that brings out most clearly the evil of natural evil. It is evil not in the sense that it's a consequence of moral evil, but rather in its contrast with the fulfilled Kingdom of God in which Jesus will finally be Lord. Jesus confronts illness in the Gospel accounts as evil, not because of sin, but because of eschatological incompleteness.

SLIDE. The really big theological puzzle for us right now is why the cost in terms of suffering, disease and death needs to be this high in order to bring God's new redeemed family, by freely willed response, into the new heavens and the new earth. We are a bit like scientists at the moment with quantum theory. From a utilitarian perspective it works perfectly as a theory - all experiments fulfil its predictions as expected. But we can't at present incorporate quantum theory within normal human logic and experience, although we might be able to do that one day. So could it be that the biological package deal we have, or something very like it, really is the only way in which truly free humans can be formed and fashioned in such a way that they can respond freely to God's love and know Him forever? We will never know the answer to that question, not in this life anyway. But even the possibility of an affirmative answer provides a very powerful theodicy. Just as we can't really make sense of quantum theory in our current state of knowledge, maybe if we had a few more missing pieces of the jigsaw the problem of natural evil might look very different.

SLIDE. And in the meantime the doctrine of Adam and Eve, however we understand the details, has an enormous impact on our understanding of human dignity. Here is C.S. Lewis, speaking through Prince Caspian: **'You come from the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve', said Aslan, 'And that is both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar'.**

SLIDE. Now I am very aware that our discussion of this highly emotive subject has been rather dry and academic for a topic where we more often need an arm round our shoulder than yet another argument. So I'd like to close with this reflection from Diogenes Allen from Princeton Theological Seminary, that represents a position somewhat to the right in the spectrum of omnipotence: 'Through Christ it is possible to understand how the Father's love is present in all things, even in suffering. Suffering can be regarded as a mark of our distance from God because we are subject to the cosmos simply by being creatures. Yet, depending on a person's response to suffering, a person can be in contact with God *through* their suffering and *in* suffering. To be in touch with the reality God has made, even when it is a painful touch, is to have indirect contact with him who is above it and who is above all else, love. Insofar as it is contact, it is good; insofar as it is painful, it is not. But what a difference when the *same* pain results from the grip of a friend, and not the mindless grip of nature'.

And with those words I will close and be happy to take questions.

