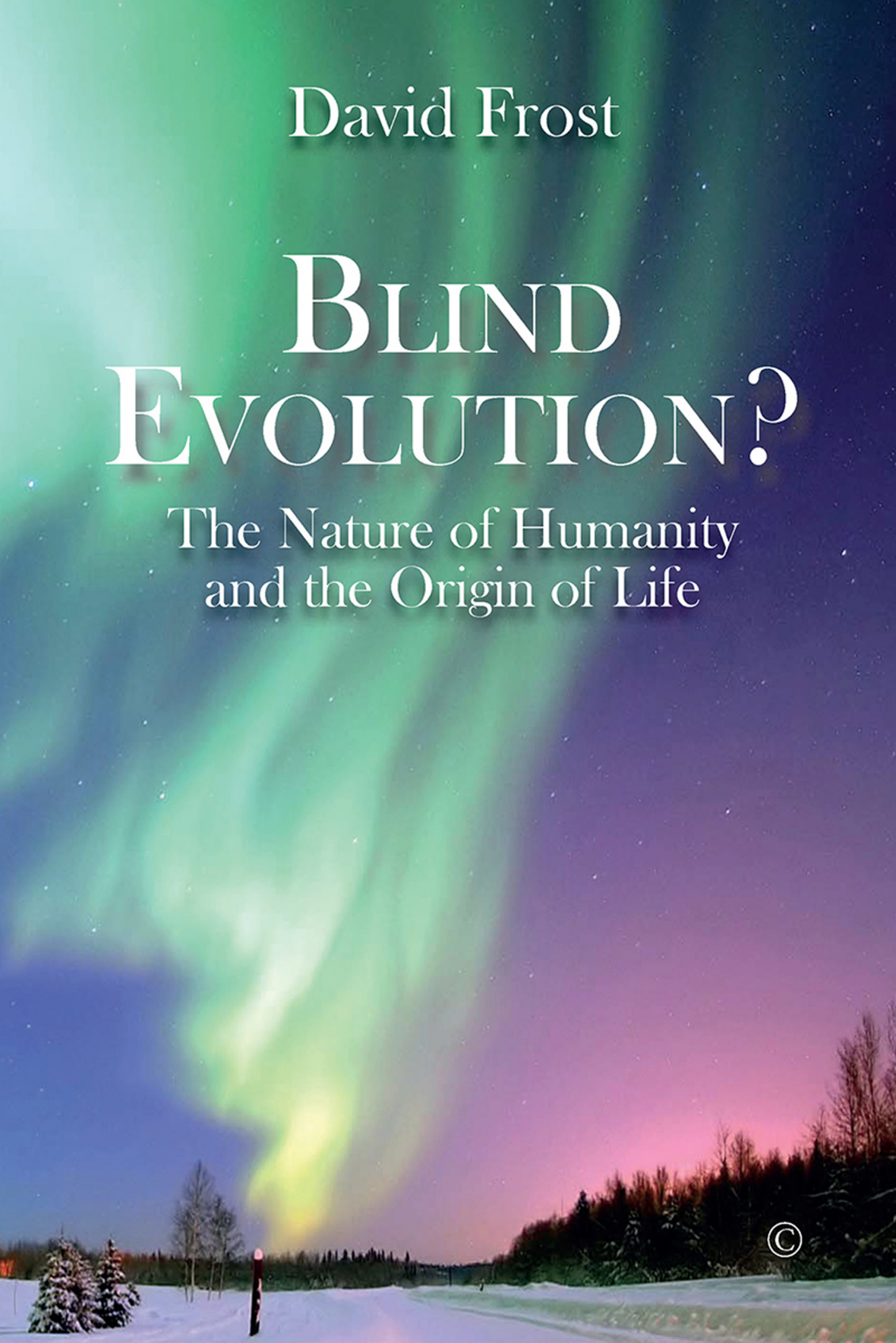
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BLIND EVOLUTION?
The Nature of Humanity and the Origin of Life
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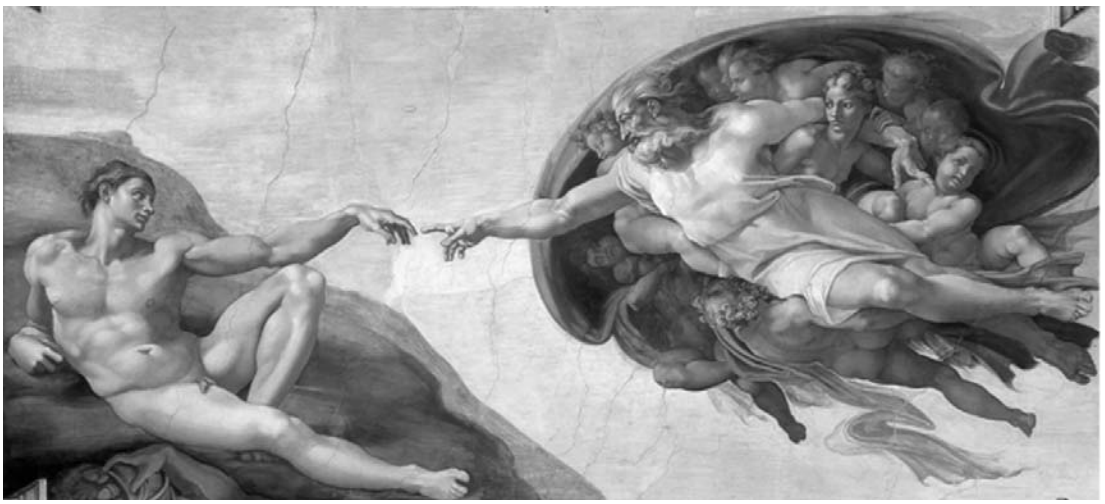

The Creation of Adam,
Sistine Chapel fresco by Michelangelo, c.1508-12.

Blind Evolution?

The Nature of Humanity and the Origin of Life

David Frost

James Clarke & Co

P.O. Box 60
Cambridge
CB1 2NT
United Kingdom

www.jamesclarke.co
publishing@jamesclarke.co

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To my grandchildren,
Daniel, Matthew, Natasha, Tiffany and Sebastian,
whose delightful reality lured me to explore again
the whole question of origins

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Preface

It is now more than fifty years since the events that occasioned the writing of this book. I was then a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge and had just been appointed to a lectureship in the English Faculty of the University. As a specialist in English Renaissance drama who was about to publish a study of the interaction of Shakespeare with his contemporaries, *The School of Shakespeare* (1968), and also as a member of a Church of England Liturgical Commission charged with devising an *Alternative Service Book* in acceptable modern English for the Anglican Church (my special responsibility, with a panel of Hebraists, being a modern English translation of the Book of Psalms), I must have seemed a godsend to my Faculty colleagues as supervisor for a newly arrived student from India, Mangala Nilakantan, in 1968 the first woman to win the Nehru Memorial Scholarship. She (though a Hindu from a Brahmin family distinguished by many generations of scholarly pundits) had offered a research topic that spanned both Christian theology and literature: 'The Problem of Evil in Jacobean Drama'.

Recent research directed by the University of Kent into beliefs currently prevalent in five different countries indicates that a large proportion of any population, whether they be atheists, agnostics or followers of an established religion, hold that some things 'are just meant to be'. But however appropriate the arrangements made by the Cambridge English Faculty, after what was only a year of supervision I felt obliged, by what

I still hold to be a proper if unwritten code of conduct, to inform the Chairman of the Faculty that I and my pupil had developed a more than academic interest in each other and hence she should be directed to another supervisor.

We are now two years away from celebrating fifty years of marriage and if 'By their fruits shall you know them' be an acceptable test, our meeting was providential for the fulfilment of what we both felt ourselves, as individuals, required to do. Together we have brought up four children, all of whom have experience of differing cultures. We have five grandchildren, to whom I have dedicated this current book, because their existence has confronted me with the basic questions that I wrestle with daily and which are the subject of this present study. Christine Mangala, who before our marriage was baptised into the Christian faith, has fulfilled the aim of the Nehru Memorial Trust to encourage understanding between members of the Commonwealth of nations, by, first of all, publishing a series of novels in English set mainly in India and drawing on her knowledge and experience of the culture into which she was born. Her first volume, *The Firewalkers* (1991), was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Best First Book Prize and the London *Deo Gloria* award. Though she currently has a fourth novel, *Shalimar Gardens*, forthcoming, its narrative set in an India now convulsed by Hindu and Muslim conflict, her fundamental concern for reconciling competing religions, which has been her interest in inter-faith dialogue, has been maintained by teaching comparative religion in the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia (where I was for twenty-one years a Professor of English Literature and for part of that time also Chairman of Religious Studies), and then subsequently back in Cambridge, where for eleven years I held an honorary post as Principal and Administrator of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, part of the Cambridge Theological Federation, where Christine Mangala could further her research interests as an invited lecturer. Finally, by publication of *The Human Icon: A Comparative Study of Hindu and Orthodox Christian Beliefs* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2017), she has discharged her obligation both to her Hindu past and her Christian faith.

From all this, one duty remains, which springs from the days of our first meeting and which my own book is designed to fulfil. Our developing personal relationship meant that Mangala had to be directed to a new Faculty supervisor, Wilbur Sanders, who, though eminently qualified, expressed some unease lest her evident religious concerns might dominate what, by its nature, he felt should be a more dispassionate intellectual pursuit.

Then occurred one of those catastrophic irruptions of evil into everyday life that brings everything we have believed about our situation and our very existence into question. The young daughter of Mangala's new supervisor, crossing the road outside their home in Grange Road, was knocked down by a passing car and killed outright.

We both felt, I as a colleague of Wilbur Sanders in the Faculty and Mangala as his current research student, an obligation to call on the family and, as the conventional term is, 'to convey our sympathies'.

The memory of that visit has stayed with us for all of the intervening years. We found ourselves, like Job's comforters in the Old Testament, unable to do more than sit on the ground with him and weep. What else was there to say?

Discovering what more there might be to say has been my recurring preoccupation for almost half a century: I am no longer content to sit on the ground and weep, and would rather try to explore and reconcile what seem our contradictory human experiences as a race or species. Hence, my original title for what was initially a proposed series of lectures for the Antiochian Orthodox Church of Australasia, 'The Goodness of God and the Problem of Evil', which the President of the Cambridge Institute, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, suggested might be emended to 'The Goodness of God and the *Challenge* of Evil', since I might otherwise be read as claiming to have entirely solved the problem! Being myself an incompetent mathematician, my retort to him was that for me a 'problem' signified something that you were always unable fully to resolve. But I am especially grateful to my then editor at James Clarke & Co., Frazer Merritt, for perceiving that the immediate interest of my writing for today's public was likely to be my 'boots-and-all' attack on atheistic neo-Darwinism, countering its assertion that evolution had occurred solely by chance and is essentially without direction or meaning. Hence, the stark and questioning title, '**Blind Evolution?**', for which my own subtitle, 'The Nature of Humanity and the Origin of Life', gives some indication of the range of discussion made possible by a more discriminating approach to scientific evidence. However, I cannot neglect mentioning Frazer's successor as Production Editor at James Clarke & Co., Debora Nicosia, who achieved that writer's dream: of giving the author exactly what he or she wanted, without compromising the book-designer's craft.

It is usual in a Preface to thank those who have contributed to the book – but with the exception of Christine Mangala, who should by rights be credited as co-author – it turns out that, when you reach beyond an eightieth year, most of those who were formative in your life

and work have passed on and will now have, if our shared beliefs were correct, a better appreciation of just how I much owe them – a 'great cloud of witnesses'. Nevertheless, among my family support team, I owe a special debt to son Mark, his wife Fong and children Matthew and Daniel, who have endured living daily with a work in progress, to son Kim, who advised on content and how to make stills, to daughters Juliet and Meera and her husband Dan Juncu, who gathered the illustrations so essential to my argument, and who have also kept me in touch with the likely preoccupations of readers of their generation. But above all, I'd like to thank two pair of longstanding friends who have been with us from the outset, Dr Robert Cockcroft and his wife, Susan, and the Revd Dr Andrew Macintosh, formerly Dean of Chapel of St John's College, Cambridge and his wife Mary, all of whom stood by us from our first meeting to the present day, and in counselling us both have invariably got their advice precisely right, if judged by its outcome. Andrew has a preferred method for ending a letter, which is an appropriate conclusion to my own Preface: '*Onward – and Upward!*'

David Frost,
Christmas Eve, 2019

Chapter One

The Answers of the Book of Job and the Experience of Mankind

In one sense, all that could helpfully be said on the problem that my proposed course of lectures was to face – 'The Goodness of God and the Challenge of Evil' – is already there in the Old Testament, in the Book of Job, written sometime in the first millennium before Christ. I hardly need to remind you of what it contains but I shall be interested to see if I can get through even a private rehearsal of its conclusion without breaking down in tears – something which I have never achieved when reading in public.

The story opens with Satan (whose name means 'the Accuser') suggesting to God that his servant Job, a man to all appearances entirely good and upright, is only so because of the rewards that he gets out of his righteousness: 'But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face' (Job 1: 11). So, God allows Satan to do to Job whatever Satan fancies – provided he leaves Job's person alone. So Job's work-animals, his oxen and his donkeys, are stolen by the Sabeans, who kill the servants looking after them. Then Job's sheep, together with their shepherds, are struck by lightning and his camels are taken by raiding Chaldeans. Finally, a desert wind collapses the house where Job's sons and daughters are feasting and all his offspring are killed (Job 1: 13-19).

But Job refuses to charge God with wrongdoing (Job 1: 22), so that when the angels (in Hebrew, 'the sons of God') next assemble before God, God is able to point out to Satan that Job (and I quote the words

given to God) 'still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason' (Job 2: 3). Satan is then permitted to inflict what illnesses he pleases on Job, short of killing him: so Job receives 'painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head' (Job 2: 7). His wife is exasperated by Job's claim not to have deserved all this: 'Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!' (Job 2: 9) but she rightly gets slapped down by him: 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' (Job 2: 15).

Then three friends arrive, trying (much as we moderns would) to help by giving Job their company.

> But when they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads. Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was.
> (Job 2: 12-13)

If any of us have had to visit a couple whose child has been knocked down and killed by a passing car, could we do anything more than Job's friends – sit on the ground and weep with them?

At the outset of Chapter 3 of the Old Testament account, Job opens his mouth and curses the day of his birth. He asks, 'Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come' (Job 3: 20-21). That finally pushes Job's guests to the point where they feel that have to say *something*.

'Job's Comforters' are notorious as an instance of the kind of people who offer comfort that is no comfort at all. But, in a way, they have had a bad press. Eliphaz the Temanite is the first to be moved to say something – and his attempt to help chimes in with a great deal of human experience. He argues that God is just – and if Job is entirely innocent, he will eventually be vindicated: 'As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish' (Job 4: 8-9).

The comfort that Eliphaz the Temanite offers Job is something that appeals to unbelievers and Christians alike: the assertion that there is, eventually, some justice in the world is based on widespread experience. Since I want throughout this discussion to tie matters to what we actually feel, I am prepared to testify that, when I think of the wrongs done to me in the course of a lengthy career, those cases where I know I had not been

at fault have sooner or later been exposed, and the eventual consequences have been (at least so far) much to my benefit. The problem then seems to be, as the proverb puts it, that 'The mills of God grind slow' – vindication is late in coming.

The pagan Plutarch in the first century AD, in his *Moralia*, writing 'On the Delay in Divine Vengeance', sees the idea as one so widespread that even a sceptic must take some notice – although he adds: 'I do not see what use there is in those mills of the gods said to grind so late as to render punishment hard to be recognized, and to make wickedness to be fearless.'

However, that isn't exactly what we see happening, for sometimes things seem better than that – and again I am going to venture into personal experience. When I first arrived in Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia, for an interview for the Professorship of English at the University, I was met by an Anglican priest, the Revd. Lance Johnston, Principal of the Anglican training college of St John's, Morpeth. He was representing the Anglican Newcastle Diocese, since I was an Anglican of some reputation in the Old Country. But he and his wife Jenny went far beyond the call of duty in helping my young family to accommodate to a new country, and we became lifelong friends.

Now jump thirty-nine years, from early 1977 to mid-2016, when I received a phone call across the world from Newcastle, Australia, requiring me to give evidence to the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which was then investigating charges against a ring of senior homosexual clergy in the Newcastle diocese, who were alleged to have grossly, even blasphemously, abused young boys. A former mature student of mine had given evidence to the Commission that she had reported to me after a class that her adolescent son had been violated at a diocesan youth camp run by certain clergy, and I had undertaken to take up the matter with the then Bishop, Alfred Holland. I could not recall the name of the student after a gap of at least three decades but I did recall the incident, because it was unique. I could testify that I had informed the Bishop in confidence and that he later rang me to say he had contacted the boy's mother. If I suspected that not much might have been done, or that the boy's mother might have exaggerated, I had alerted the proper authority and had to leave matters there.

But my evidence thirty or so years later supported the mother's account and Bishop Holland was forced to fall back on the defence that he recalled nothing of the alleged episode – but that answer – 'I can't remember' – was a defence which a letter from the diocesan solicitor had

advised the Bishop to make to all awkward questions – and it had been shown to the Commission. The charges of grossly improper behaviour by clergy were supported by a mass of testimony, and the bishop who had done nothing about it was now, in advanced old age, exposed and disgraced.

However, 'the slow mills of God' had not done yet. My lifelong friend, Lance Johnston, had been Principal of the theological college where many of the offending clergy had trained and he was at risk of being held responsible for a corrupt clique, or for turning a blind-eye. I was able, thanks to our long friendship that had sprung from Lance's initial care of my family, to testify that, as a Member of the St John's College, Morpeth, Board of Management and because our intimate family connection was so close, it was unbelievable that we would have not known of any problem that the Principal had with a paedophile ring.

That friendship led to some further evidence from me to the Commission and to the eventual humiliation of the next Bishop of Newcastle, Roger Herft, who by the time the Commission met had gone on to be Archbishop of Perth. It had been alleged before the Commission that the senior priest, who was a ringleader of the homosexual predators (though now dead) had been cross-examined by Bishop Herft, but the priest had managed to intimidate the Bishop by threatening legal action if any move were made against him. The excuse made for the Bishop doing nothing was that he had insufficient evidence to hand. However, I recalled one visit to my Newcastle home by my friend Lance Johnston, in great distress because he had just been told, immediately after confiding some intimate personal matters to the Bishop in an interview, that 'You do realize, Lance, that I record all conversations with my clergy, and the tapes are kept in the cellar at Bishopsthorpe'. We were therefore able to point to the likelihood of tapes being made and probably still existing of the Bishop's discussions with the offending priest, and we could substantiate our allegations as to the Bishop's practice, since we had been so outraged by it that we had later written jointly to a Committee considering appointments to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, suggesting that Archbishop Herft's violation of clergy trust made him unsuitable to be a candidate for that high office – and an acknowledgement of our objection was on record from the then Prime Minister's Secretary. In response to the Commission's criticisms of his inaction whilst Bishop of Newcastle, Roger Herft felt obliged to resign as Archbishop of Perth.

The problem with Eliphaz's consolations is that they are true to experience but they don't go far enough. He asks the protesting Job

to 'Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?' (Job, 4: 7). But take the instance of the Hillsborough disaster in England in 1989, where a football-stand collapsed and the ensuing panic cost the lives of ninety-six people. Responsibility was finally laid at the door of those who had been at fault, even if it took twenty-seven years to do it. Those who covered up what had happened were exposed, and *The Sun* newspaper, which had spread lies about allegedly irresponsible crowd behaviour, had its reporters banned from the premises of Liverpool Football Club. The bereaved who had campaigned for justice at last had closure and expressed an enormous sense of relief – but nothing could bring back their loved ones, killed for no crime but only because someone had been negligent or incompetent. However, exact justice did not stop there, for in November 2019 the police officer who had responded to pressure to admit insistent fans to stands he knew were already overloaded, and who had admitted to his shame that he had to an earlier enquiry denied his action, was acquitted of manslaughter. Strict justice required that he not be held guilty for more than an accidental, if admittedly negligent slaying, whilst those remaining of the bereaved who had demanded 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' were deprived of what would only have been a pointless multiplication of evil.

But even that problem is resolved in the Hebrew version of the Book of Job, which has what Christians are bound to see as an extraordinary prophecy of Christ's coming, which took place at least half a millennium after the writing of the Book of Job. The prophecy is known internationally through Handel's *Messiah* and I'll quote it from the *New International Version* of the Bible, because it is a passage in the Hebrew scriptures which for reasons unknown was never reproduced in the much later translation of the Hebrew text into Greek for the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, made for Jews who could no longer read Hebrew. Many Orthodox Christians still take the Septuagint as their version of the Old Testament, even though it is at many other points seriously defective. It is probable that the Orthodox adopted the Septuagint version of the Old Testament because that was the Bible translation known to most early Christians, especially the writers of the New Testament – but in so doing, they have deprived themselves of a passage of extraordinary and crucial comfort:

> I know that my Redeemer lives,
> and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.
> And after my skin has been destroyed,

yet in my flesh I will see God;
I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!
(Job 19: 25-27)

That reads like a prophecy of the God/Man, Jesus Christ, who by his voluntary and innocent sacrifice, a death entirely undeserved, has conquered death itself and promises resurrection to all who have died and forgiveness for any wrongdoing, if only they will accept his gift of himself. How the prophecy got there in the Book of Job, or how it was omitted from the Septuagint translation, are both a mystery. But its promise is the full and complete answer to the problem of evil. And even if it is not in the Bibles of Orthodox Christians, the truth has somehow filtered into Orthodox thinking, for Righteous Job is celebrated as a 'type' of Christ, a forerunner of the one wholly righteous God/Man who 'by death trampled down death' and by his and our resurrection offers a complete justification of God's goodness and a total solution to the 'Challenge of Evil'. If we follow Christ, it will lead to the cross and we are likely in the world's eyes to be crushed; but our destruction, like his, is not final: justice and restoration await us.

Meanwhile, in the story, Job's Comforters persist with their insistence that, somewhere, somehow, God being just, Job must have gone off the rails. Job longs for a chance to have it out with God, face to face. 'So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes' (Job 32: 1). The last person to speak to Job is the young man Elihu – and he dismisses the arguments of the Comforters altogether: 'I gave you my full attention. But not one of you has proved Job wrong; none of you has answered his arguments' (Job 32: 12). Elihu claims to be fired by 'the spirit within me' (Job 32: 18) and he argues that only God can refute Job's charge of injustice: once one fully appreciates what God is, what he has done, the mystery, glory and complexity of all his creation, his ways of communicating with individuals and his care for all things, and how man alone has been equipped to appreciate and reverence his wonders, then all questioning and protest will seem blasphemous. That theme is common throughout the Book of Psalms: God's nature is revealed in all that he has made. Take the opening of Psalm 19, vv.1-6, which I'll cite from *The Cambridge Liturgical Psalter*:[1]

1. *The Cambridge Liturgical Psalter (with Notes)* (Cambridge: Aquila, 2012), first published as *The Psalms: A New Translation for Worship* (London: William Collins, 1976, 1977), used in and bound up with *The Alternative Service Book 1980* as *The Liturgical Psalter*.

The heavens declare the glory of God:
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork;
One day tells it to another:
and night to night communicates knowledge.
There is no speech or language:
nor are their voices heard;
Yet their sound has gone out through all the world:
and their words to the ends of the earth.

You may remember how in the Book of Job God eventually does speak in answer to Job's complaining – and how God silences him by what God's modern and hostile critics have called a display of overweening power, an appeal to superior divine knowledge and might, a list of his spectacular achievements in creation, even (it is said) by a kind of fireworks display – to the point where Job's doubts and protests are simply overwhelmed.

I shall quote this time from the King James Authorized Version, for that is where I first met the words that I have never been able to read in public without breaking down:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,
Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?
Gird up now thy loins like a man: for I will demand of thee;
and answer thou me.
Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
declare, if thou hast understanding.
Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest?
or who hath stretched the line upon it?
Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened?
or who laid the corner stone thereof;
When the morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?
(Job 38: 1-7, Authorized Version)

After four chapters of this, in which God appeals to the glory, beauty and complexity of the natural world that he has created, Job cracks:

Then Job answered the Lord, and said,
I know that thou canst do every *thing*,
and that no thought can be withholden from thee.
Who *is* he that hideth counsel without knowledge?
therefore have I uttered that I understood not;

things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.
Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak:
I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.
I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear:
but now mine eye seeth thee.
Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.
(Job 42: 1-6, *AV*) (my emphasis)

This is the point where I too crack – and, whatever the cynics may say – it is not at the display of some almighty power: it is the experience of God as he is, first-hand experience, face to face, that blows away all doubt as to the goodness of God and whether or not he is (as the ancient Orthodox liturgies keep reminding us) 'the Lover of Mankind'. My doubts then feel like a betrayal of that love and, like Job, I am moved to 'repent in dust and ashes'.

If direct experience of God is what blows away all doubt, then it follows that an experience of God as he is, as a God in reality both just and loving, must be open to every man, woman and child. We can as Christian counsellors, whether clergy or laity, point to the blocks to faith, and so to the barriers to direct experience of God that are a consequence of human wrong attitudes and human wrongdoing. But when it comes to the apparently meaningless, inexplicable evils that permeate the world around us, we will need to bring to sufferers some explanations that can satisfy both head and heart – and the evil suffered by ourselves and our fellow human beings cannot always be explained by the suspicion that we or they have done something wrong.

Evil extends throughout creation – and Australia forces the fact on newcomers such as my wife and myself when we first arrived to teach at the University of Newcastle in early 1977. Someone in our early weeks presented us with a book entitled *The Venomous Beasts of Australia*, and I would regale my Indian wife by sitting up in bed at night reading titbits – such as the news that the taipan is *sixty times* more deadly than the Indian cobra. (How that is measured I cannot fathom: – was it done by lining up 60 persons to be bitten – and then noting that they all died?) The next Sunday we went to Newcastle Cathedral, where the first hymn was Mrs C.F. Alexander's '*All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful: The Lord God made them all*'. That night I wrote back to 'England's green and pleasant land', to the Dean of Chapel of my Cambridge college, sending a parody that may still exist: *'All things vile and horrible, All creatures great and small, All things inexplicable – the Lord God made them all!'*

These realities touch the lives of Australians more than those in the 'Old Country'. We were befriended when we first arrived in New South Wales by the much-loved Dean of Newcastle, Robert Beal (later Bishop of Ballarat) and his wife Valerie – and he once told me of an incident in the early days of his ministry when he was called to help a parishioner who had stepped on a stonefish when paddling off the beach in Townsville and who then spent nine hours dying in excruciating agony. What could one do? What could one say?

And yet we must say something to those whose experiences are a barrier to any belief or trust in a good and loving God. That is the whole purpose of *theodicy*, the attempt to argue that God is good, just and also loving – and it will be the core of everything I have to say.

But because I am not so much concerned with any *technical* problem in theodicy, with any *intellectual* enquiry into God's goodness, I now want once more to get 'up close and personal' and try, by showing you two contrasting photographs, to make clear just what the problem is for me.

The first photograph is of two of my grandsons, who live with us and their parents in a joint family:

Daniel and Matthew Frost.

Whenever I am sunk under reports of the wickedness of the world or am swamped by what appears to be its meaninglessness, I sit quietly in a corner of the living-room and contemplate Daniel and Matthew. Eight years ago Daniel did not exist; eleven years ago, neither did Matthew. They came into my life out of nothing. Yet they are so beautiful, so

amazing in their skills, in their movement, their intelligence, their ability to communicate and their capacity to give and receive affection, that the only appropriate reaction is reverent and astounded silence. And that is what is due to each one of us, and has been due to each of our ancestors, for thousands of years.

Charlie Gard and his parents.

The second couple of photographs have gone around the world, fed by a media that keeps its audience by trading in vicarious suffering and stirring anger at distant sorrows. Nevertheless, the pictures of Charlie Gard and of his grieving parents bring us up short.

Charlie Gard suffered from a rare inherited disease: *infantile onset encephalomyopathy mitochondrial DNA depletion syndrome* (MDOS for short). Our genes give the instructions for the growth and maintenance of our bodies, and Charlie had inherited through his parents a faulty RRM2B gene. This defect, which affects the development of the body cells responsible for energy production and respiration, left Charlie able only to move and breathe with the aid of a ventilator, and he had to be fed through a tube. It also causes multiple damage to the organs of the body, including irreparable damage to the brain. On 8 June 2017, after a succession of court judgements had determined there was no hope of a cure, the British Supreme Court decided Charlie's doctors could cease providing artificial life-support.

The passionate rage that gripped people worldwide was not, I believe, so much against the doctors or the judges, or in sympathy with parents who were determined never to give up the hope that their child might live: the anger was primarily that such things could be. Whether you believed the world was the result of meaningless chance and purposeless evolution, or even if you thought a supposedly loving God had created or permitted such a horror, the protest was against the stark facts of existence as we experience them: against the reality of things as they are.