

How Does the Tragedy at Port Arthur Relate to Our Belief in a Powerful, Wise, and Loving God?

The horrific events at Port Arthur last weekend evoke various reactions. "A person who does such things has surely forfeited the right to live" (Gn 9:6). Surely there is no longer any right to a 'fair trial' and further waste of money in expenses! Were it not for taking of hostages, calling the air force in might perhaps be the best way prevent further loss of life. Some would like revenge on a private capacity, but that belongs only to constituted authority." No amount of such talk, however, can deal with the purposeless waste of so many lives, whom God originally designed to bear His image. No amount of "counselling" will erase the grief of so many families, and the shock of witnesses, and of those who had to deal with the aftermath.

We are living in an evil world. Disasters such as this in this evil world seem to strike at random, with no relation to individual guilt. Two such chilling disasters occurred at Jerusalem in Jesus' time. Pilate executed some Galileans and mixed their blood with the sacrifices they were offering in the temple. A tower at Siloam collapsed, and killed eighteen people. Jesus said two things: those who were killed were no guiltier than other people were; and unless people repent, they will all perish as those people did. He obviously pointed to the far worse punishment for sin, in eternal damnation. The urgent need is for every person to be ready for life in the age to come, through repentance and faith in Jesus, the Saviour.

However, how can a believer answer the sceptical reaction of unbelievers about such chilling events? Let us put their case in the most logical form, in order to deal with it. They would say:

You claim that God is 1) powerful, 2) all-knowing, and 3) loving. If there is a God at all, He may be one, or two of these, but He cannot be all three.

1) He may be powerful and all knowing, but to allow such a thing to happen, He cannot be loving. He must be harsh and unfeeling, even vindictive. The Moslems are fatalists, and believe that Allah sends good as well as evil. If you have a God, you will have to try to be at "peace" with such a God, for He is like that. That is what Islam means, being at peace with a God who maliciously or imperiously sends evil as well as good.

2) He may be powerful and loving, but He did not know such an event was going to happen. So His power and His love could not help.

3) He may have known it was coming, and may be a loving God, but He was powerless to stop it. There are indeed passages in the Bible that say that God "sends evil." "*When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?*" (Amos 3:6). However, the "evil" here that the Lord causes is not moral evil in God, but the "evil" punishment, which the just God sends on sin and unbelief. The flood at the time of Noah, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans are other examples of the Lord's sending disaster, which we may call "natural evil." However, the greatest truth that Christians can say about God is that He is a God of love.

What about the other possibilities 2 and 3? Of course, He knows all things. Of course, He is all-powerful. The same problem is there again, and beyond our power to deal with adequately, when we speak of God's creation of the world. He knew in advance that sin would spoil His good creation. He had the power to prevent it. He was also a God who cared for His creatures. His love for them is clear in the fact that from eternity He planned a redemption, and, even before He placed His curse on Eve and Adam after the fall, He announced the coming of His Son, the "Seed of the woman", who would crush the head of the Serpent. He is a God whose love moved Him to deal with the human dilemma. It is pointless to ask questions that we cannot answer, like, "Why create a world that He would have to destroy in the flood) or that He would redeem at the great cost of the life of His own Son?" Even worse still, "Why has God created so many human lives whom He designed originally to bear His own image, who, He knew in advance, would refuse to accept Jesus His Son as their Saviour, and whom He would consign to eternal torment because they stumbled over the "Rock of Offence"?

All we can say is that the greatest test of anyone's love is a double one: Is he or she prepared to put that love into practice whether he or she feels the loved person deserves it or not? And is he or she prepared to put himself or herself on the line for his or her love when it comes to paying the cost of it? Paul wrote: "*To be sure, at the set time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly. You see, it is a rare thing that a person would die for someone who is righteous, through perhaps a person might be brave enough to die for someone who have been good. But God shows His love for us by this: While we were still sinners. Christ died for us*" (Rm 5:6-8).

The case has to be put simply and positively. God, who has created this world and sustains it by His great power, wisdom, and foreknowledge, is indeed a God of love, even when He seems to deal with human beings in

puzzling ways. He is able to bring final good for those who believe in His love, even out of their sufferings. When He disciplines His believers, that is never done in wrath, revenge, or punishment. As a loving parent, He chastens or disciplines His genuine children, for their good. He has also made room, in His providential care over the events of the world, to answer the prayers of His dear children. He has also promised to provide with every test a way of escape, that they may be able to bear it.

What we have been saying is sometimes called a “theodicy.” That is a word for trying to show that God is just and right after all. Of course, He is just and right. Rather, say that every man is a liar than attribute moral evil to God! But the essential thing to assert is that He is, nevertheless, God of love, and that He has shown that in His Son. Through repentance and faith, we believers shall receive the wonderful inheritance He has prepared for eternity in glory for His own. There wickedness, pain, suffering and death will be removed finally.