

CHURCHLINK

WEBZINE

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Much to Hope from the Flowers

The atheists have some explaining to do. For a long time they have told us believers that we must explain how a good God could create a world full of pain and suffering. Fair enough, but the atheists need to answer the opposite question: How could an unconscious, godless universe produce so much goodness, truth, and beauty?

When skeptics ask how a good God could make a bad world, they imply that the burden of proof lies on anyone who wants to defend God's existence and his goodness. We believers can gladly accept the burden of proof, if only because the question troubles us also and leads us to search for answers. When we see evil on a large scale—millions murdered, widespread famines, genocides in too many places to count—we sometimes wonder what God is up to, or even if he exists. And when we see evil on a small scale—a child born disabled because of her parents' drug abuse, a particular injustice done to someone we know—we wonder even more.

We have all heard the standard answer: that God didn't create evil, people do, when we humans misuse the freedom he gave us. Will the standard answer hold water? I think so, though admittedly it works better in the abstract than in the particular. It explains your suffering well enough, but what about mine? And yet this answer goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. God created the world as "very good" (Gen 1:31), but the first people fell into sin, and all of us followed when our turn came. A good world corrupted by sin—that's the world we live in.

What kind of world do the atheists think they live in? A world that has no intelligence creating or guiding it, a grim world where something came from nothing, order arose spontaneously out of chaos, ideas of truth and goodness came from some kind of survival instinct, and our appreciation for beauty is a mirage.

In Arthur Conan Doyle's story, "[The Naval Treaty](#)," Sherlock Holmes makes a remarkable statement:

"There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion," said he, leaning with his back against the shutters. "It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. All other things, our powers, our desires, our food, are all really necessary for our existence in the first instance. But this rose is an extra. Its smell and its color are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers."

If God does not exist, where did our appreciation of beauty come from? If God does not exist, why do we humans have a universal conviction that some things are true and others false? If God does not exist, why do we react against injustice? The atheists need to tell us, if they can.