

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