

Is God really cruel?

Hilda Marlin

Here is a reaction to Charles's article. I do realise that he personally was not losing his faith because of the terrible things Hitler did, but what he said is, I think, and as he thinks too, felt by many. It is the problem of an omnipotent God who allows evil.

Of course logically it is not possible to create time and change and not have some suffering, but I think it is the extreme of suffering that causes the difficulty. Though perhaps, if we weren't so used to it, death itself is bad enough, and also inevitable in a world where new people are born every day. And to have a world with only the same old people does seem dreary.

But, as I say, I am not using that argument. I understand the difficulty. As Charles says, it is the appalling suffering caused by the Nazis that poses the question. And the question contains another question: what is omnipotence? What is power? And we are reminded of the old fable of the sun versus the wind, and how the wind with all his bluster could not make the man take off his coat, but the sun, by shining quietly, could.

The trouble is that we think too much of machines. A good machine works by its own laws and does not go wrong. But that is because a good machine has no will of its own. It IS a machine, and the world is not. God's omnipotence could only work that way if He refused to make us free. But He did not do that, and in order to free us He had to limit His power. If we are really free, we have a choice. It is our responsibility. If we choose wrong we have to shoulder the consequences and not blame God. It's no good expecting Him to say: "Poor dears, they disobeyed me, I'd given them careful directions as to how to use my world, they did what I expressly forbade them to do...but I can't bear to see them suffer, so..." yes...what WOULD He do? How do you visualise that? Should He have killed all the Nazis by lightning, taking away their chance to

repent? Or should He have suspended the laws of nature so that gas ovens did not kill and bombs did not burst? And when would the laws be reinstated again...or would we have to live for ever in an Alice in Wonderland world where anything can happen?

They do not realise that God's omnipotence can make a world with an inbuilt teaching apparatus, where, if we disobey His laws, and especially His law of love, suffering results. The consequences are sometimes so terrible, the suffering so appalling, that we begin to see the importance of His laws and want to obey them.

"All right," you say. "But an omnipotent God should be able to do SOMETHING to help those of goodwill, those who did obey His laws and are martyred by those who didn't."

How? Even our human laws can't deal with exceptions. If we started on exceptions there would soon be no laws left. We can't deal with "hard cases". We can't be sentimental.

There was only one way in which God, who is Love, could intervene, and that was by example, by submitting Himself to His own laws, by showing us how they should be obeyed and by suffering the consequences of our disobedience Himself. Loving Omnipotence can find no other way.

And that it worked was shown by that same war, the war that Hitler waged against humanity. So many accounts have come from the camps and other places of God's saints, of how they followed in Christ's footsteps and manifested His power in His way. God's goodness and power were shown in ordinary people who believed in God and relied on Him, and for whom He worked miracles (among many others, read the books by Corrie Ten Boom).

There was more victory in that than in the bombs we sent over Dresden. Loving omnipotence is loving. It is through the power of love that God works. And to love, we have to be free. Robots can't love. Constraining power would take away our freedom and therefore our love.

If we want to know the loving power of God we must look at

Christ and look at his saints.

And it is very probable that if there were no evil to overcome, if everything had been hunky dory, Christ would not have been born.

O happy fault, says the Church, that brought us our Redeemer.

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Faith in a concentration camp

Kurt Ostberg

I noticed that John Ferguson's "top twelve" books contained two which I also have treasured for a long time, the one by Arthur Grimble, the other by Andre Schwarz-Barth [DTV Vol.2 No.5], and I wondered what might be Charles's comment on the quotation from the latter in the light of his own article on p.61 of the same number.

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No comment: but a pertinent tale

Charles Sprague

A Mensan friend of ours, an English Jewish lady, toured Israel some years ago together with a young Christian Englishman who was then living there and spoke Hebrew well. One of the places they visited was a church run by Italian nuns on the lake Gennesareth. They arrived around noon, climbed a hill, and ate their sandwiches while admiring the view; then the young man went down to the nearby convent and, in his best Hebrew, asked for the keys to the church. He was told that it was not convenient at the time and was asked to wait. An hour or so later, his Jewish friend in turn went to the convent and asked for the key in fluent Italian. The nuns readily handed it to her, but with a warning: "There is an awful young Jew waiting to visit the church - be careful not to let him come in along with you!"

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